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Narratives of Sexual Abuse Disclosure

By

Gail E. Manwaring

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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Dedication

For my sister Anne

who had the courage, strength and will to survive.

May the nightmares end and you forever live in peace.

Abstract

This study concerns the meaning of disclosure for survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse. Four women; Angela, Valeria, Nita, and Monica shared their stories about being sexually abused as children by a family member. In particular, they shared their experiences about disclosure. Narrative inquiry was utilized to interpret and to arrive at the personal meaning of disclosure in these survivors' lives. The varied and complex experiences the survivors had with disclosure brought a unique meaning to each one of their lives; for Angela it was closure, for Valeria it was peace, for Nita it was a sense of inner strength, and for Monica it was self-respect. The overriding goal of this study was not to find common themes, but rather to understand the complexities and unique experiences that each individual had in terms of disclosure. These meanings were interpreted through the stories that the participants shared. In essence, it was found that 'disclosure' brought significant meaning to each of the four women's lives.

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Chapter 1

Let's Start From the Beginning

It is important to recognize that all research is framed and influenced by the researcher's culture, values, experiences, assumptions and beliefs. I have chosen to study the meaning of disclosure for survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse because of my own personal experience with these issues. As Ann Oakley (1992) suggests, "we must claim the right to pain and passion. In order to do this, we have to begin by examining our own history" (p.4). My passion for this research study begins with my own experience of being a survivor of intrafamilial sexual abuse as well as my experiences concerning disclosure. I have chosen narrative inquiry as the methodology for this study and therefore I think it is appropriate for me to share my personal experiences in these subject areas through story. These experiences have essentially framed my study. In particular, I will share my experiences concerning disclosure because this is the focus of my study.

My Story

My story begins when I was a young child of five years old when my father began to sexually abuse me. He stopped when I was 12 years old but the aftereffects are still with me today. When my father first molested me, he broke a sacred trust that can only exist between a parent and a child and he stole a part of my childhood innocence. In essence, he changed my life forever. If he had never sexually abused me, I expect my life would have been different, not necessarily better, but different. For instance, my interest in studying these issues is largely because of what my father began 21 years ago.

For me, disclosure and 'secrecy' go together. If there is no secret, then there is nothing to disclose. I did not tell my mother or my two older sisters, or anyone until I was 20 years old. Thus, I had kept a secret. Because of the secrecy, my feelings of anger, hurt, guilt and confusion built up inside of me. I tried to eat them away with food but that only numbed them away for short periods of time. I ended up going through a period of depression when I was about 19 years old, probably due to all of the feelings that I had never acknowledged or shared with anyone else. I think this period of depression was an outlet for me to express the hurt and the anger that I felt, without having to give away the

secret.

Eventually, however, I did disclose to my best friend Angela. I let out the secret and it felt good. For the first time, my feelings were valued and acknowledged. I had not planned to disclose but somehow, in retrospect, I feel I must have been ready psychologically and emotionally to face the challenge. When I told Angela what my father had done to me, I didn't view this as a disclosure, but rather one friend sharing with another. I trusted her and therefore I knew subconsciously that what I had to say would be validated and valued. And it was, Angela was very supportive, always has been, and continues to be today. I took a risk when I told Angela about my experience, but the risk paid off. I think the supportive response that Angela exuded gave me the courage and self-confidence to then disclose to two more of my close friends. Again the response was positive, and they were both very supportive. I think disclosing to friends is less of a risk than disclosing to family members because your friends are not usually connected to your family, therefore they have no motivation to disbelieve you. Because of the disclosure their lives will not change. Friends most often do not have emotional ties to the perpetrator and therefore their interest remains with you.

Although sharing my experience with my friends proved to be a very important step for me, I also recognized that it bothered me that my family didn't really know me, largely because of this secret. I felt disconnected from both of my sisters and my mother, not to mention my father. I felt it was hypocritical to give my dad a father's day card every year when I despised him for what he had done to me. We played the role of the perfect family, yet there was this secret that was rocking our very core.

At the age of 21, I went traveling with my sister Anne, 4 years my senior. This would be the first time I would be away from home for longer than 3 weeks. I had planned to be away for about 10 months. Anne was already living away from home as she had moved out when she was 18. I was already 21 years old and still living with my parents. I call this year of traveling a turning point for me because what happened during this time changed my life forever.

Anne and I left in September of 1991, and we spent the first part of our travels in the South Pacific, including Fiji, Raratonga in the Cook Islands, New Zealand and

Australia. While we were in New Zealand, in October, we had decided to take a 3 week backpackers' bus trip around both the North and South Islands. It was during this bus tour that I, for the very first time, disclosed to a family member, Anne. To my surprise, she also disclosed to me. It was pouring with rain outside and we had just come back from watching some traditional Maori dancing. We were in our small hostel room and we were doing laundry. We had to take turns running out in the rain to get to the washers and dryers in the next building. I don't remember how we started talking about it but Anne told me that our father had molested her and that he had shown her these pornographic magazines as a young child and that he had made her perform oral sex on him. I was shocked. For all these years, I honestly believed that I was the only one. I then told her about my experiences with him and she was also shocked. Being my eldest sister, she said that she had always tried to protect me from him. She told me that she tried to never leave me alone with him. We both cried that night, together, and at last I felt I was connected to my family, that I was connected to her in a way that we both could never change.

After we discovered that there were now two of us that had been victimized, Anne and I debated over the next 8 months as to whether or not we should tell our mother. We thought our father shouldn't get away with the abuse but at the same time we didn't want to destroy our mother's life. We imagined every outcome possible and none of them seemed very positive.

By July of 1992, I was on my way back to Canada and Anne had decided to stay abroad for an indefinite amount of time. We still had not come to any conclusions about whether we should 'tell' or not and so we basically left it up in the air.

I did not know what to expect when I finally went back to Canada. I had gained a self-confidence in myself over the past year that I had never felt before. I didn't know if I could just go back home and pretend that nothing had changed, that Anne and I had not confided in each other. About 2 weeks later, I went out for lunch with my sister, Jane, two years my senior, and I then asked her if she had been sexually abused by my father. She said that he had never touched her or molested her, but that she knew he had abused Anne. I then proceeded to tell her about my experiences of sexual abuse and how Anne

and I had disclosed to each other. Anne and I were perplexed that my father had abused the two of us and not Jane. Later, however, I learned that it is quite normal for some siblings to be 'skipped over' in abusive families. Jane was also very supportive. She disliked my father for her own reasons and she also felt betrayed by our father for what he had done to Anne and I. I told Jane that I was thinking about confronting our father and telling our mother about it. She indicated to me that she would be supportive, whatever I decided to do.

Soon after, I began to get depressed, I missed being away from home and experiencing new adventures every day. I also realized that living with my father had a greater impact on me than I had ever recognized before. I began to withdraw into myself again and I felt I was beginning to lose the self-esteem that I had gained while I was away. The secret was beginning to eat away at me once again. I decided to seek professional help and I went to see a psychologist at one of the sexual assault centres. This helped me a great deal. After a few individual counseling sessions, I then started to attend a group for survivors of sexual abuse.

At this point in time, I had disclosed to my close friends, both of my sisters and my psychologist as well as the other members in the group I was attending. The most important people in my life, my parents, were the ones I was most fearful of telling and confronting. Telling them was a huge risk because I had the most to gain if the responses were supportive as well as the most to lose if the responses were not. After attending approximately one month of group counseling sessions, I made the decision that I would disclose to my mother and confront my father. I planned the whole thing carefully and I decided that, in October, I would do it. And I did. One day before 'the day', I told my parents that I wanted to meet with them the following evening after dinner in our living room. I informed them that I had something that I wanted to talk to them about. They both agreed. The next day my father was very quiet the whole day. I think he sensed what I was going to do. My friends also knew what I was going to do and they were all standing by for support. They later told me that they even drove by our house while the big meeting was taking place, just in case I needed them.

This is how it all went. I asked my parents not to say anything until I was finished

with what I had to say. I told them that it was very important that they not interrupt me. Then I just told them everything that I was feeling, how I felt betrayed by my father and how he had really hurt both myself and my sister Anne. Both of my parents respected my wishes and they sat there in silence. I could see the tears welling in my mother's eyes but she didn't seem that shocked by my disclosure, which surprised me. She then informed me that when Anne was a young child my father had confessed that he had touched her once inappropriately. My mother said that she was upset at the time and that he had promised her that it would never happen again. When she told me this, the pedestal that I had placed my mother on for so many years began to crumble. I was so sure that she would be shocked by the whole thing, but I was wrong. I was angry at her for a long time afterwards for not taking some action when Anne was a child, but I realize now that she did the best she could at the time. In those days, sexual abuse was rarely talked about, especially in the media, and people were ignorant about the harmful effects that sexual abuse could have on a child. My mother was also married to a man that she trusted and loved. I cannot begin to understand the pain and the hurt that she had to endure after my disclosure.

My father cried when I confronted him. He told me that he did it out of love and that I was so loving and happy all the time as a child, he was attracted to me. He also said that he was relieved that it was all out in the open now because the guilt that he had felt for so many years had been eating away at him. He then started mumbling, through his tears, that he wanted to commit suicide but that he didn't have the courage to do so. I felt that I had handled things well until that point but then I bought into his subtle manipulations, and I came to his rescue and started to comfort him. I was comforting my father as if he had been the victim and not me. However, one thing I am grateful for is that he didn't have the audacity to deny that he had sexually abused Anne and I.

The days and weeks that followed 'the day' seemed to proceed as normal. My parents continued to interact as if nothing had happened. I'm not sure what I expected, but this was not it. I felt that either my parents had not heard me or that they were just not able to deal with these issues at the time. The tension in the house was thick as I had pretty much stopped communicating with my father. I didn't know what to say to him

anymore and somehow him saying 'sorry' was just not enough for me. I was also angry with my mother because I felt she was being too nice to him. In essence, my mother continued to play the role of the 'good wife'. My father did start to seek some counseling but I knew that he was doing it for my benefit and not for his.

Approximately 3 months after I confronted my father, he left our home and he left town. He moved far away but he kept in contact with my mother through letters. I think it was really me he was leaving and not my mother, because I don't think he could face me anymore. I was still living with my parents and I believe that if I had not been, he probably would have never left. I am still angry with the manner that my father handled the situation, but I am glad now that he did leave. I finally began to feel comfortable in my own home and the tension had magically disappeared with his absence. I think I finally felt free. He wrote my mother letters but he had virtually no correspondence with myself or either of my two sisters.

My parents have been separated now for about 4 years. He has little if any contact with my sisters or I. I don't think Anne has seen him in about 6 or 7 years and I haven't seen him in about a year. When I do see him or talk to him on the phone, our conversations are very formal. I don't really feel connected to him anymore. I have let a lot of the anger I have had for him go because I felt it was hurting me more than it was hurting him. I don't love him or hate him anymore. I do care about what happens to him but right now he's just a presence in the outskirts of my life.

Disclosing in many ways has really changed my life and this is why I have chosen this topic for my study. I have a new relationship with both of my parents now. I no longer send my dad father's day cards just because everyone else does. I also see my mother as a human being now with strengths and faults. I think we have a much more honest relationship now than ever before. I don't feel I have to be silent anymore, I am more easily able to share my feelings with other people and I rarely get depressed. I feel more confident about who I am. I realize that I have also lost a father in the process, but I have gained so much more. A huge weight has been lifted off of my shoulders. Not only is my relationship with my mother more real now but my relationship with both of my sisters is stronger. We support each other, and I feel we are a united front. I think disclosing to

family can be complicated and painful, but also rewarding. Ann Oakley (1992) sums this up nicely when she talks about the concept of family,

> It signals both the most loving and the most hating of relationships, both the highest degree of liberation and the basest level of oppression. Some of my best moments have been lived in the family and so have some of my worst (p.85).

I wouldn't necessarily label my experiences as 'positive' but I am so glad that I did it, I don't know what my life would be like right now if I hadn't.

Not everyone has the same experiences with disclosure or the same feelings about it. Some people plan it out and consciously make a decision to disclose, whereas others may disclose without really thinking about what they are doing. I chose this research topic because I wanted to know if disclosure has brought as much meaning to other survivors' lives as it has to my own. I have disclosed to both friends and family and I think there is a big difference between the two. I wondered if other survivors had the same kind of experiences. I wanted to find out how other survivors viewed their experiences and if they were content with the outcome after disclosing.

And so this research story begins...

Chapter 2

An Introduction to Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse and Disclosure

Intrafamilial sexual abuse is a prevalent problem in our society today. In Canada, sexual offenses against children began to be recognized as a serious problem in the late 1970's. The Parliament in Canada established a committee in December of 1980 to inquire into the matter more fully and to make recommendations for future action concerning the sexual abuse of children. The committee found (The Badgley Report, 1988) that approximately one in two females and one in three males experienced unwanted sexual acts at sometime during their lives and four out of five of these acts happened as children or youths. It is estimated that approximately one in four perpetrators as a family member (Wells, 1990). "Evidence of the widespread nature of the problem is provided by the growing numbers of adolescent and adult survivors who are seeking treatment. Survivors regularly report that they did not reveal their sexual abuse as children" (Rogers, 1990, p.20).

Impact of Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is most commonly defined as bodily contact of a sexual nature ranging from an invitation to do something sexual, sexually oriented touching and sexual intercourse, both vaginal and anal. Intrafamilial sexual abuse of a child is defined as occurring before the age of 14 (in Alberta), by an assailant of any age, who is at least five years older than the child (Miller, Downs & Panek, 1992; Wells, 1990). The perpetrator in these situations is described as a relative or person in a position of trust who has a close relationship to the child (Miller, Downs & Panek, 1992; Wyatt & Mickey, 1987).

Because the child knows and has a close relationship with the perpetrator, the environment in which the abuse takes place (often the family home) is usually considered a 'safe' environment by the child (Holstrom, Bergess, & McCausland, 1977). "What makes incestuous abuse different from other forms of child sexual abuse is that the abuser lives in, and is treated as, a member of the household or family. This gives him both easier and

continual sexual access to the girl, as well as other forms of control over her" (Kelly, 1988, p.71). In this environment, the child's trust is violated and his/her innocence is taken away as someone, for whom he/she probably cares and loves, crosses his/her personal and generational boundaries. Innocence, as defined by Webster's dictionary (1993), means purity, or lacking experience or knowledge about something or being naive. Once a child loses his/her innocence, he/she cannot get it back because the experience and the knowledge will always be there.

Abuse of any kind always has lasting emotional and psychological effects. In the case of intrafamilial sexual abuse, the effects can be traumatic as the child ultimately may lose the trust of someone about whom he/she loves and cares. As indicated by the current literature, the impact of this phenomenon on a child can have lasting, significant consequences. Promiscuity, prostitution, eating disorders, alcoholism, substance abuse, depression, suicide, and poor self-esteem are only a few of the possible outcomes of intrafamilial sexual abuse (Frawley, 1990; Schatzow & Herman, 1989; Wyatt & Mickey, 1987). The newest threat to survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse, both children and adults, is HIV and AIDS. Those that cope with sexual abuse by dealing drugs or by prostituting themselves are of particular concern. "Among offenders whose behaviour is compulsive and repetitive it is only a matter of time before the AIDS infection will appear" (Rogers, 1990, p.21). Thus it can be argued that the consequences of intrafamilial sexual abuse are not limited to individual, they extend to the community and society as well. The prevalence of intrafamilial sexual abuse affects us all and it must be understood that there are traumatic consequences for survivors as well as their friends and families.

Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse And The Power Element

It is important to recognize that the sexual abuse of children is indicative of deeply rooted societal values, especially values that are related to gender inequity and the misuse of power. "The social context that has allowed children to be sexually abused for generations only encourages the perpetuation of the exploitation of power" (Rogers, 1990, p.81). That fact that in well over 90% of reported child sexual abuse cases, the offenders are male, is a very clear gender dimension of this issue. Our society continues to evolve

from a value system that places men in the dominant role and women and children in a subordinate one (Rogers, 1990). Given the high number of reported cases of child sexual abuse in Canada, it can be assumed that there are many adults in our society who exploit power for their own benefit. Intrafamilial sexual abuse is not only a family problem, but also a cultural, societal and community problem.

It should be apparent that although intrafamilial sexual abuse involves the sexual exploitation of children, it also involves a significant power element. Just by being older, a relative, or a person in a position of trust, the perpetrator has a powerful advantage over the child. This power element is exploited and abused by the assailant as he/she takes advantage of the child in a sexual manner. Thus intrafamilial sexual abuse is, in essence, a social and political problem that stems from a patriarchal society's inability to protect its victims (Barrett, Trepper & Stone-Fish, 1990).

Disclosure and Healing

When incest is present in a family, the preservation of the 'rule of secrecy' may become the organizing principle of all of the family relationships. Every member of the family who is involved in or knows about the sexual abuse that is happening in the family, intuitively knows to keep the secret. The secret is not discussed between family members or with any outside individuals. This secrecy protects the perpetrator and is often imposed on the victim with threat or intimidation. "Secrecy is imposed by the perpetrator with promises and threats, ranging from the gently insidious to the brutally forceful" (Frawley, 1990, p.247).

Secrecy can ultimately compound the trauma of sexual abuse by isolating the victim and causing self-blame. Because of the traumatic impact of keeping the secret of incest, the act of disclosure has been described as an important step in the process of recovery for the survivor, as a child or an adult (Schatzow & Herman, 1989). Disclosure of sexual abuse is defined as verbal information given by the survivor indicating that they had experienced sexual abuse (Keary & Fitzpatrick, 1994). "Disclosure occurs when the need to keep information private subsides and the wish to be open and share this information becomes more important" (Ben-Ari, 1995, p.158). Disclosure of the abuse

may also have many impacts within the family. These impacts can be positive, in the case where family relationships are brought closer together, or they can be negative, when family members disbelieve the survivor resulting in poorer family relationships. For example, Roesler and Weissman-Wind (1994) suggest that although disclosure in childhood may result in support and protection of the child, conversely it can also result in disbelief, anger and the breakup of a family. However, for the survivor, "unburdening is a powerful step toward giving up the shame, guilt, and a sense of responsibility for the abuse that so many survivors feel" (Schatzow & Herman, 1989, p.338).

Disclosure has been viewed as an important step in personal healing as well as protecting the family in the future from further incidences of sexual abuse. When the 'secret' is disclosed, it is hoped that family members become aware of the perpetrator's identity and that the offender is then prevented from continuing to sexually abuse anyone else. We as a society know little about the survivor's experience of disclosure and the barriers that may prevent him/her from disclosing earlier. Therefore it is important to gain a greater insight and understanding of disclosure from the survivor's point of view.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and gain a greater understanding of the meaning of disclosure(s) to survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse. When a study concerns *meaning*, many questions are possible. How do survivors feel about deciding to disclose? Was it a conscious decision? What do they think prevented them from disclosing in childhood? What kind of responses did they receive when they disclosed? What kind of response would they have preferred from the person(s) they disclosed to? What is it like to disclose to friends as opposed to family members? What has disclosure meant to their lives and how important was it to them? These are all questions that will be considered when looking at the meaning of disclosure from the survivor's point of view.

Potential Contributions of the Study

My main goal in carrying out this research study is to help people better understand

survivors' experiences with disclosure and to advance knowledge about intrafamilial sexual abuse in general. It is also hoped that a better understanding of the potential and actual roles the public have in ensuring healthy family environments for the future will be attained. I think it is important to encourage further research in the area of intrafamilial child sexual abuse as it is a prevalent problem in our society. Gaining a greater understanding of disclosure from the point of view of survivors will perhaps help us, as a society, to make it easier for other survivors to disclose and begin the healing process.

Organization of Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis is a reflection of the past, the foundation from which the ideas and questions concerning disclosure have grown. This second chapter is meant to give the reader a better understanding of the issues concerning intrafamilial sexual abuse and disclosure as well as a rationale for pursuing this study in particular. Chapter 3 includes a review of literature which provides the research context and it delineates the current knowledge base for this study. Chapter 4 includes a description of the rationale for utilizing narrative inquiry as the methodological approach, how participants were chosen for this study and how the stories that were gathered in this study were interpreted. Chapters 5 through 8 contain the interpretive stories of the four survivors who participated in this investigation. Chapter 9 comprises a discussion section which describes what has been learned from the participants' stories in terms of disclosure and Chapter 10 includes an exploration of the implications of this study, ideas for further research as well as thoughts for the future.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

In order to find out more information about the issues of intrafamilial sexual abuse and disclosure, I looked at the current (1985-1996) research studies. I discovered that this body of literature about disclosure covered three main areas, timing issues (childhood vs. adulthood disclosure), relational issues (family members as confidantes and their responses), and issues concerning the impact of disclosure on the survivor. I also discovered that there has been little emphasis or research on the personal meaning of disclosure for survivors considered from a holistic perspective. Thus the purpose of this review is to outline the findings and the gaps in the current literature and to shed light on issues that need further exploration.

Timing Issues

The timing of disclosure in a survivor's life seems to be an issue of concern for researchers in the area of sexual abuse. Disclosure is often labeled as "childhood" or "adulthood" and the differences between the two are examined. The following studies give an indication of the differences between the two and they explore why some survivors may disclose in childhood verses adulthood. These studies also attest to whom children and adults are most likely to disclose.

Farrell (1988) investigated factors that were related to the victim's disclosure of their abuse experience by analyzing the age of the victim, the duration of the abuse, and the seriousness of the abuse. This research about childhood disclosure focused on two main categories of reported cases of incest, self-disclosure and non-disclosure (outside reportings by agencies because of signs or symptoms of abuse). This information was sought through a questionnaire given to departments of social services between 1985-1986. The results showed that self-disclosure reports to social service agencies increased with age up to 17 years. The least serious forms of abuse (no sexual intercourse) were reported more frequently in both the self-disclosure and non-disclosure categories. From

these results, one suspects that the younger the victim, and the more serious the abuse, the less likely it is that the child will disclose.

In addition, Sauzier (1989) conducted a study concerning sexually abused children and found that if they did disclose, mothers were by far the most likely confidante. The average age of the victimized children in this study was 10.1 years. The children had experienced a wide variety of sexual activities but for 28% of the children the most 'serious' sexual act was either vaginal or anal intercourse. In terms of disclosure, they first told a parent 55% of the time. "In 17% of cases, the child's initial disclosure of sexual abuse did not lead to any intervention, either because the child was not believed (9%) or because the responsible adult took no action (8%)" (Sauzier, 1989, p.458). In terms of the relationship between the child and the offender, it was found that children who were sexually abused by a 'natural' parent were more likely to keep the secret and to be seen (treated at the Family Crisis Program) because of accidental disclosures (53%). Children who were abused by an extrafamilial offender more frequently told right away but still in only 37% of cases.

In terms of the timing of disclosure (childhood vs. adulthood), the issue of choosing an appropriate confidante is also considered. Lamb & Edgar-Smith (1994) discovered in a telephone survey of survivors of sexual abuse that adult disclosures may be more positive for the victims. Because the abuse has stopped, less direct action is required from the recipients of the disclosure. Adult survivors may also have the psychological and emotional maturity to discern who will be supportive in their reactions to the abuse and thus are more deliberate in their choice of a confidante.

Concurrently, in a study of the psychological adjustment of female undergraduates after sexual abuse, it was reported that 34 out of 69 women who had been sexually abused attempted some sort of disclosure. Of those who had disclosed, 27 had a supportive response and 7 had a negative one. Out of the 27 positive responses, the majority had disclosed to a friend and of the 7 who had negative responses, all had disclosed to a family member (Everill & Waller, 1995).

In the case of adult survivors' disclosure of intrafamilial sexual abuse, there may still be as profound consequences as there are for children in terms of disclosing to their

family of origin. However, as adults, they have more power to take some control over the situation and they are more able to survive independently outside the confines of the family (McNulty & Wardle, 1994).

Timing of disclosure concerns not only timing in terms of the developmental age of the victim, but it also affects issues related to the response one receives from a confidante. While age has been the key factor in the study of timing, it is not merely chronological age that is critical. As children and adults are developmentally at different stages, their ability to deal with the responses both emotionally and psychologically will differ. The body of literature that is examined next deals with the relational issues of disclosing in both childhood and adulthood.

Relational Issues

Whether it is a child or an adult disclosing, there are many relational issues to consider. These are issues concerned with the relationship between the survivor and the confidante, the relationship between the confidante and the perpetrator, as well as the past relationships between all three. All of these relationships will inevitably have an impact on the survivor's experience with disclosure. Because children most often disclose to their mothers, it is important to examine the issues that a mother faces as well as her response to the child. Adults, however, may choose other confidantes such as friends, therapists or other family members. Questions that may be asked are: what are the emotional concerns for a confidante? and what kind of issues impact a confidante's response?

In an analysis of father-child sexual abuse case studies, it was found that the mother in the role of confidante of the child was often faced with a very difficult dilemma, believing her husband and denying the abuse, or believing the child and acting to protect her child (Lipovsky, 1991). She most likely had to choose between her husband or boyfriend and her child. "Common feelings noted by mothers seen in therapy include the fear of losing their spouse's financial and emotional support, anger toward the husband for possibly having abused the child, anger at the child for making a report that is difficult to accept, jealousy, a sense of competition with the child and a sense of inadequacy for not protecting her child" (Lipovsky, 1991, p.87).

Concurrently, the probability of maternal support after disclosure was studied by Everson, Hunter, Runyon, Edelsohn & Coulter (1989). In this study children who had been sexually abused, predominantly by father-figures (88%), were evaluated by semi-structured interviews and the Child Assessment Schedule. The intent of this study was to find out about the history of abuse as well as disclosure and family reactions to the allegation of abuse. Children were recruited from 11 county social service agencies in North Carolina over a 28 month period. Out of the 100 children in the sample, 88 were selected between the ages of 6 and 17 years. The sample was 84% female and the average age was 11.9 years. The results indicated that the level of maternal support to the child after disclosure was highly correlated to the offender's relationship to the mother. If the mother was currently in a relationship with the offender, she was less likely to support the child in their allegations of abuse. It was also found that the children who received low levels of support from their mother after disclosure had higher levels of psychopathology than those who received high levels of support from their mothers.

Also concerned with maternal support following disclosure, this next study examined factors related to a child's abuse experience and problems in the family that could have precluded a mother from believing her child (Sirles & Franke, 1989). The data from this study were taken from questionnaires that were given at intake interviews at the Washington University Child Guidance Centre (CGC). One hundred and ninety three child victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse were included in the study. Results indicated that mothers were most likely (92.3% of cases) to believe the report of abuse if the offender was an extended family member (grandfather, uncle, cousin, etc.). If the offender was a biological father, mothers believed their child's report in 85.9% of cases. However, the proportion of mothers believing the report decreased to 55.6% when the offender was a stepfather or live-in partner. "In terms of the nature of the abuse, a mother was less likely to believe the report when the abuse involved genital-genital contact" (Sirles & Franke, 1989, p.134).

Thus far it seems evident that maternal support in terms of childhood disclosures is an important research area. The dilemmas that mothers face are complex. Believing and supporting one's child after disclosure seems to largely depend on the closeness of the

relationship between mother and the perpetrator. Roesler & Weissman-Wind (1994) further suggest that disclosing to family members can be a very different experience than disclosing to someone outside the family. Roesler & Weissman-Wind (1994) surveyed 228 women victims of childhood incest and found out the following: the identity of the first person told, why people wanted to disclose, why they told their story, and the response of the first person they told. Both survey and open-ended questions were utilized. Their results supported the "intuitive idea that disclosing incest to someone inside the family is a very different experience for a child than is disclosing to nonfamily members. This is most probably accounted for by understanding that immediate family members have the most reason to fear change as a result of the disclosure" (Roesler & Weissman-Wind, 1994, p.334).

The relational issues that survivors face, whether they are children or adults, are complex. Confidantes who are family members are often strongly connected emotionally to the perpetrator. Receiving a supportive response from a confidante is not guaranteed, thus disclosing may become a personal risk to the survivor.

Disclosure about other sexual issues also may have some commonalities. For example, homosexuals often have to deal with complex relational issues when they disclose about their sexual identity. Wells & Kline (1987) administered an open-ended questionnaire to 23 male and 17 female volunteers. This questionnaire as designed to assess how, when, where, why, and to whom gay men and lesbians disclosed their sexual orientation. The results confirmed that disclosing one's gay identity was a process of disclosing intimate material thus also involving anxiety about the potential responses from confidantes. "The primary concern expressed by gay and lesbians respondents about self-disclosing their sexual orientation was selecting people who would not disapprove of them due to their homosexuality" (Wells & Kline, 1987, p.196). It was also reported that most of the respondents felt caught in a "double-bind" because although they were motivated to disclose to develop better relationships with their friends and family, they were not willing to risk disclosure for fear of rejection.

Similar to the findings in the previous study, Ben-Ari (1995) explains that the motivation to disclose for homosexuals are primarily connected to relational issues.

"Common reasons given for the disclosure of homosexuality to parents include to be honest and stop living a lie, to open up communication, to strengthen family bonds, to deepen love, and to provide opportunities for mutual support and caring" (Ben-Ari, 1995, p.308). It seems clear that whether or not one is disclosing to a family member about sexual abuse or one is disclosing about one's sexual orientation, the relational issues involved are important and complex. These relational issues are also connected to the impact that disclosure may have on the survivor.

Impact of Disclosure

There can be many short and long term potential impacts of disclosure on the survivor. These impacts are often influenced by the reactions of the confidantes. A supportive response seems to be connected to a potential for a more positive impact on the survivor. The following studies outline some of the experiences survivors may have after disclosure.

This next study was designed to assess the reactions of a sample of persons (all but one of whom were women) who were willing to talk about the incidents of sexual assault in their lives and how the act of confiding may have related to their adjustment (Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz & Garwood, 1991). Harvey et al. (1991) emphasized the content of the disclosure as well as the disclosure experience itself. It was hypothesized that disclosure about the traumatic event would be positively associated with psychological functioning in the future. For participants in this study, the average length of time since the assault was 18.5 years, and a questionnaire was administered to 25 women and one man. The questionnaire was open-ended and addressed issues such as; the relationship of the perpetrator to the assault victim, a detailed account of the assault (where, how, when), whether or not the respondent had confided in anyone, and the reactions of the confidante pertaining to how they feel now, emotionally and psychologically. Thirteen of the respondents had suffered from incest and only 5 out of 26 respondents had reported the assault to the authorities. Overall, the results indicated that successful coping was positively connected to early confiding along with a helpful reaction by the confidante. "These data support and reinforce the foregoing conclusion regarding the value of helpful

reactions to confiding attempts" (Harvey et al., 1991, p.525). Similarly, Kelly & McKillop (1996) "contend that when a person does reveal a personal secret, the real or perceived reactions of the confidante are critical in determining whether the person will benefit from the revealing" (p.450).

Contributing to these findings, Berliner & Conte (1995) designed a cross-sectional study to investigate the impact of disclosure and intervention on a sample of sexually abused children. Eighty-two children and their parents were given structured interviews as well as self-report quantitative measures. In this particular study, the most common form of abuse in the study was found to be molestation (53%), followed by statutory rape (22%). The offender was a parent figure in 20% of the cases. The children also indicated that they told their mother first in 48% of instances of disclosure. Friends were the next largest category of confidantes, first person told was a friend with 17% of cases. Some of the emotions experienced by the children after telling about the abuse included relief (69%), fear (16%), sadness (7%) and anger (2%). This study identified the wide range of emotions expressed by children after telling someone about their abuse and emphasized the difficulty of this process.

Summary of the Results

In terms of the timing issues, whether a person discloses as a child or an adult, may represent different experiences. I learned that when children disclose they usually first choose their mothers or a parental figure for a confidante. When adults disclose, however, they most often disclose first to a friend. Adulthood disclosures were considered as more positive experiences probably due to their ability to be more deliberate in their choice of confidante, thus increasing the possibility of receiving a supportive response more often.

However, regardless of what age a survivor discloses, the relational issues involved seem to be complex. When mothers are chosen as confidantes by their children, they seem to be faced with difficult decisions. These decisions seem to largely be dependent upon her emotional ties to the perpetrator as well as to the 'seriousness' of the abuse. Disclosing to family members in particular seems to be a personal risk for both children and adults.

These relational issues are also connected to the impact that disclosure may have on both children and adults. The impact of disclosure appears to be directly connected to whether or not the response by the confidante is helpful and supportive. The emotions expressed by survivors after disclosure can also vary from relief to anger.

Gaps in the literature

Thus far, we know when survivors disclose and to whom they are most likely to disclose. We also know that the response of the confidante is important. I think that overall the current research is very useful, but it is limited in adequately explaining the intricate complexities that are involved. Some questions that still concern me are; what was it like for survivors to disclose to family versus friends? and what was the nature of the aftermath, how did it feel? How have relationships changed with family members after disclosure? What was the process of disclosure? In essence, I am interested in finding out how the survivor views their whole experience of disclosure. I think the words 'positive', 'negative' and 'supportive' are limited in what they can really tell us about a survivor's actual experience.

It is clear that the timing of disclosure, the relational issues involved and the impact of disclosure are all interconnected. It is hoped that at the end of this research study, we can learn a little more about the in-depth complexities of all of these issues through the stories from survivors.

Chapter 4

Methodological Issues

Rationale for Using Narrative Inquiry

There are many ways to explore the issues posed in Chapter 2 about disclosure. Because I wanted to learn more about survivors' experiences with disclosure from their perspective, I had decided that using a qualitative methodological approach would make the most sense. I wanted to know more about the quality of survivors' experiences, what kind of meaning they thought disclosure had to their lives. My intention was to understand disclosure from the emic perspective, or the "native's" point of view (Morse & Field, 1995). Dietz, Prus, and Shaffir (1994) describe the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods as follows;

> In contrast to those who send out questionnaires to people or run them through sets of experiments, the approach taken here concentrates on achieving in-depth familiarity with the life-worlds of the people being considered by venturing out into these life-worlds (p.2).

In order to learn about survivors' in-depth experiences, I thought this would be best accomplished through the sharing of stories by survivors themselves. Thus, for this research study I chose to employ 'narrative inquiry' as my qualitative methodology of choice. Josselson (1995) describes narrative inquiry in terms of hermeneutics and explains that the "essential message of hermeneutics is that to be human is to ***mean***, and only by investigating the multifaceted nature of human meanings can we approach the understanding of people" (p.43). Thus narrative inquiry as a methodology is largely about interpretation, "when we study whole human beings, we are aiming to interpret others who are themselves engaged in a process of interpreting themselves" (Josselson, 1995, p.31). Therefore the goal of this study is not to confirm hypotheses but rather to discover and unearth what is unknown about the issues concerned.

My intention in this study is to learn about the meaning of disclosure to survivors

of intrafamilial sexual abuse. It is evident, by reviewing the prevailing literature, that these experiences can be complicated, thus there are many issues to consider. Family dynamics, the history of relationships within the family, and the perpetrator's relationship to family members comprise some of these issues. My goal is to look at the whole experience, thus making context a very important element. "It is an effort to approach the understanding of lives in context rather than through a prefigured and narrowing lens" (Josselson, 1995, p.32). Narrative inquiry incorporates context into its methodology and as Chase (1995) explains, "all forms of narrative share the fundamental interest in making sense of experience" (p.1).

At this point in time I had reviewed the current literature and I had noted the strengths, limitations and gaps in the research. I then clarified my interest in the issues concerned. Then next step was to gather my participants.

The Gathering of Participants

In terms of finding participants for my study, I decided to employ purposeful sampling methods. Participants were selected based on their experiences of sexual abuse in their families. Thus, the participants were selected because of the information they were able to share about their experiences with sexual abuse and disclosure and not for their demographic characteristics (Sandelowski, 1995). It was hoped that the sample would consist of both males and females between the ages of 18 and 30 with varied ethnic backgrounds, however the primary criteria for the participants were that they were adult (18 years +) survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse. The participants were required to be able to speak and understand English, and they had to reside in Edmonton or the surrounding area.

The participants were recruited by posters (Appendix A) that were placed around the University of Alberta campus, the Sexual Assault Centre on campus as well as the Edmonton Sexual Assault Centre. An electronic mail message was also sent to all graduate students on campus describing the study. I also told my colleagues and friends about the study and asked them to tell people about the study. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, therefore the participants were required to contact me first to find

out more information about the study and subsequently to set up an interview time. There was no monetary compensation for volunteering in this study.

Participants

I put up my posters, I sent out electronic mail messages, and I implored my colleagues to spread the word about my study. And I waited for volunteers to contact me. And I waited, and I waited. I wrote in my journal;

> Well I have my posters up but now I'm afraid I will not get any participants. This is definitely taking longer than I thought (Journal entry, Nov. 9, 1996).

I waited for one more week past this date and finally I received one response from an interested volunteer. Over the next three months, 6 people in total responded to my request for volunteers. However, in the end, four of these six participated in my study. One volunteer changed her mind about participating at the last minute and one other did not fit the research inclusion criteria. All four of my participants were female and they ranged in age from 22 - 29 years. Varied ethnic backgrounds were also represented which included participants from European and Asian descent. One of my participants found out about my study from the posters I had placed around campus, two had responded after being contacted by my friends or colleagues, and one found out about my study through electronic mail. Although all four of the participants volunteered at different times over three months, they all shared one thing in common. They all had been sexually abused by a family member and they were all willing to share their stories about their experiences.

The Sharing of Stories

When I met with each participant, the first thing I did was allow them to read an information sheet (Appendix B) about the study. Then we sat down and talked about any questions or concerns they might have about participating. I gave each participant two consent forms (Appendix C) to sign, one for them to keep, and one for my own records (see Ethical Considerations). In formal terms, my primary method of data collection in this study came from guided interactive interviews. This allowed myself, as researcher, to

take an active listening stance and to follow the participant's story intently. Therefore I did have some questions prepared ahead of time to guide the interview (Appendix D), however these questions were sometimes altered or elaborated as the interview progressed. This model of qualitative interviewing was utilized to emphasize the relativism of culture, the active participation of the interviewer as well as the importance of giving the interviewee voice (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Although I view the overall process of meeting and talking with my participants as an interview, the time we shared was actually made up of conversations. The participants talked about their experiences through story and I responded to what they had to say. In many ways, the actual sharing of stories was not formal, the interaction felt more like informal conversations. Even the language we used was in conversation style.

> Language connects experience to understanding. Only by listening to what our participants tell us of their experience can we enter into dialogue with their meaning system - and this is the value of narrative forms of investigation (Josselson, 1995, p.37).

All of the interviews lasted between one and two hours, this included conversations that were held before and after the tape recorded conversations. There was no time limit on any of the interviews. "In narrative inquiry, it is important that the researcher listen first to the practitioner's story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.4). In essence, an important element of the interview was to give the participant the time and space to tell her story. Follow up meetings were also scheduled to clarify or explore further issues as well as to ensure that the story being told was congruent with the participant's perspective.

In terms of space, all interviews were held on campus in order to ensure a safe environment for both myself as researcher and the participants. The room where the conversations were held was set up in a comfortable fashion. There were 2 comfortable arm chairs, and one rocking chair placed in a semi-circle. A low coffee table with a box of Kleenex and a candle was placed in front of the chairs, which faced the window. The window sill was adorned with candle sticks and dried flowers. Coffee, tea or a beverage of their choice was offered to all of the participants. A "Do Not Disturb" sign was placed

on the outside of the door to avoid all unnecessary interruptions. All of the conversations concerning the stories of the participants were audio tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

One other form of data collection that was used in this study consisted of my personal research journal. This journal was used to record thoughts, ideas and decisions that were made during the whole research process. This journal helped me to recognize my own assumptions and biases as well as it helped me to look back and track my own thought processes. Fieldnotes were also recorded as part of my journal. These included descriptions of the setting during the interviews, non-verbal responses, emotional outbursts, and descriptions of the physical setting, as well as anything else I thought might be important (Morse & Field, 1995). I tried to write in my journal immediately following every interview in order to ensure that the detailed descriptions were thorough. My journal has proven to be an important part of the documented, audit trail in this study.

Interpreting Stories

In order to understand narrative inquiry, it is necessary to recognize that stories are essentially interpretations of life. "From a hermeneutic point of view, human life is a process of narrative interpretation" (Widdershoven, 1993, p.2). Thus the "implicit meaning of life is made explicit in stories." Therefore, it is important when using narrative as a qualitative method, that the story from the participant remain intact, in order to get an overall understanding of their experience. As described by Riessman (1993), the story itself is the object of investigation. Because I was looking for a holistic picture of one's experience concerning disclosure and intrafamilial sexual abuse, I chose to analyze the tape recorded conversations in their entirety. This type of narrative interpretation may not easily be distinguished from transcription as the listening and transcribing of the interviews often led to insights that inevitably shaped how I represented a participant's story. "Stories are ways of organizing experience, interpreting events, and creating meaning while maintaining a sense of continuity" (Ben-Ari, 1995, p.155). Therefore, through the participants' stories, I could make sense of their experiences concerning disclosure. In essence, I was interpreting the meaning that disclosure had for participants,

as survivors. These meanings may be explicit or they may be embedded in the stories that are told. "The sense of the whole is built from a rich data source with a focus on the concrete particularities of life that create powerful narrative tellings" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.5). The stories of the participants in this study are represented by my interpretations of their stories. The time sequence in which they are represented, the quotes that are shared, and the overall representation of the story is due to my interpretation. As Weiland (1995) observes, "finding or supplying meaning to lives so that others can observe, take pleasure in, and perhaps even learn from them is the aspiration of narrators" (p.59).

It is also vital in narrative inquiry that the participants have voice in the relationship with the researcher. Findings and concepts that were developed throughout the process of interpretation were cross-referenced with participants in the follow up conversations. "When one engages in narrative inquiry the process becomes even more complex, for, as researchers, we become part of the process. The two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.5). Thus, it is fundamental to the research process that a rapport be established with the participants in order to succeed in adequately representing the stories of lives that are told. It should also be noted that I have shared my own personal story with the participants as well as in this paper. My story concerns not only my research story but also my own personal experiences concerning sexual abuse and disclosure. My story along with the participants' stories have in essence shaped this research study.

Rigor

Reliability and validity of this research can be judged by the following criteria, credibility, applicability, consistency and confirmability (Morse & Field, 1995). Credibility of my findings were certified by verifying data with participants who were involved in the interviews in order to review the emerging story lines and to check for accuracy. It was important to let the participants themselves view the results to ensure the accuracy of their voices. This way I was able to ensure interpretations were accurate as

well as validate the study at the same time. It was also important to keep a personal journal throughout this research study. This way it was possible for me to check for thoughts and feelings of interactions with the participants that I had written down in my journal and to then consider whether or not they coincided with the actual representations of experience that were told through the stories. In other words, did my interpretations of the interviews fit with the interpretations represented in the stories told? In essence, "emphasis has been placed on the development of an audit trail to clearly document the researcher's decisions, choices, and insights" (Morse & Field, 1995, p.144).

Applicability of the data refers to the criterion used in determining whether or not the findings can be applied to other contexts or settings or in other groups. In other words can those who did not participate in the study, but who have disclosed, find meaning in the interpretations? It is important for the stories to be applicable to those who have disclosed but who may not necessarily be victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse (e.g. disclosure of one's sexual orientation). Appropriate detailed, rich descriptions will be helpful in enabling the reader to decide if the narrative makes sense. Applicability also refers to how well the story fits the data that they were derived from.

The third criterion, consistency, concerns the evaluation of "trustworthiness" in the findings. In quantitative methodological research, the emphasis is on whether or not the findings could be replicated using the same subjects in the same context. In terms of this research, because multiple realities are emphasized, the uniqueness of human experience is valued. Therefore "the notion of reliability is no longer as relevant" (Morse & Field, 1995, p.144). In qualitative research, it is more important to ensure that unique experiences, described by individuals, are adequately represented in the findings. This was verified in the follow up conversations with the participants when I showed them my interpretations of their stories.

In terms of confirmability, the actual utilization of the methodology can be analyzed. Documenting all decisions, thoughts, insights, biases and data interpretation techniques will guarantee the confirmability of this study. An audit trail was left by using field notes and a journal by the researcher in this study. Field notes refer to the observational notes taken by the researcher, immediately following an interview. "The

notes should specify the time and place of observation, the people present and their spatial distribution and interaction, and any other details the observer deems of interest." (Palys, 1992, p.218). As stated earlier, keeping a journal is also an important part of narrative data interpretation. My thoughts and feelings about the research were documented and this was useful in identifying my potential personal biases and assumptions about the research itself. Confirmability can also be looked at in terms of triangulation which by definition is "the use of two or more methods to simultaneously or sequentially examine the same phenomenon" (Morse & Field, 1995, p.243).

In summary, it is evident that rigor can be sought for narrative inquiry. Constant documentation of decisions, thoughts and insights about the data contribute to the overall 'validity' and 'reliability' of the results. These forms of documentation will be evidence that the interpretation of the data has not been pulled from 'thin air'. Because narrative data interpretation is by its very nature subjective, rigor as defined by credibility, applicability, consistency and confirmability were important concepts to keep in mind throughout this research project.

Ethical Considerations

My primary goal as the researcher in this study was to uphold all ethical standards for the participants as well as all who were involved in this study. Ethical clearance was sought from the University of Alberta before the implementation of this research study.

All ethical principles were upheld by minimizing any risk for the participant, respecting and protecting the autonomy of the participant, and by conducting all procedures with care and fairness (Sieber, 1993). The participants were given an information sheet which delineated their rights and responsibilities as well as an outline of the requirements of the study (Appendix B). They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and their right to contact myself, as researcher, or Dr. Dianne Kieren as my thesis supervisor, at any time with questions or concerns. The informants were also given a consent form to sign, outlining that all information given would be held confidential and anonymous (Appendix C). The consent form also indicated that as researcher, I would be ethically responsible to report any information

given to me indicating a child was at risk of harm or abuse. Conversation data were not linked to specific individuals by name or by specific details and all conversation transcripts were numbered by codes or pseudonyms. The participants also checked all written reports to assure the protection of their family's identity as well as their own. In some cases, identifying, descriptive data were generalized to provide additional protection. All data, including cassette tapes and typed transcripts were kept in a safe place and were later destroyed upon completion of the interpretive analysis.

All participants had the opportunity to have access to a summary of the results of the study. All participants were also given references (Appendix E) to resources in the field of sexual abuse if they should have desired to have further information or some formal therapy concerning these issues. It is recognized that the issue of intrafamilial sexual abuse is of a very sensitive nature and all anticipated ethical issues were addressed with the utmost care.

Chapter 5

To Be Strong

The first time I met Angela was through an E-mail message. I had E-mailed some of my friends and had asked them to E-mail their friends about my study and then to pass the message along. Shortly thereafter, I received a message from Angela stating very simply that she would be interested in participating in my study. Ecstatic about actually finding my first participant, I eagerly set up an interview time for us to meet. The day before my first interview, my journal entry reads;

> So my first interview is tomorrow. I'm excited to do it but scared at the same time. (Nov. 26, 1996)

We scheduled the meeting for 9:00 a.m. and, as I was nervous, I arrived an hour earlier to make sure the room in which I had planned to conduct the meeting looked the way I wanted it to and that I was prepared. I had my information sheet and consent forms all ready, sitting neatly on the desk and I had the filter for the coffee maker already in place, just in case she wanted coffee. I had my tape already placed in the recorder and the chairs placed just so far apart that our knees wouldn't touch but at the same time we would hopefully feel comfortable in the space. At 9:10 a.m. I started to get worried and by 9:30 when there had been no sign of Angela I reluctantly left the room and wondered what had went wrong. Did I get the right time? Four long days later, I felt I could breathe again;

> Well I E-mailed my participant and it turns out she still wants to participate, supposedly she got her days mixed up. This is a relief because I was so sure she had changed her mind all together. (Journal entry, Nov. 30, 1996)

So far this was not how I had imagined it would be like, but needless to say I managed to stay positive. The big day had arrived again and this time I was not as excited because this time I was prepared for a no-show.

> So 'the' interview has been rescheduled for today, this morning at 9:00 a.m. I had dreams about it all last night. I'm at the point now where I just want to get it over with. I really hope she shows up today. (Journal entry, Dec. 3, 1996)

And she did show up. When Angela arrived, we seemed to hit it off right away, we actually ended up talking about ourselves for quite a few minutes before and after the

taped conversation about ourselves as if we had known each other for years. Angela talked rapidly and easily and that somehow made me feel calm, I then knew that she would have no problem talking about her experiences of sexual abuse and disclosure. We just seemed so comfortable talking with each other that I don't think it would have mattered what we had talked about. My first impression of Angela is of a tall, brunette, slender young woman, with an angelic looking face, thus the pseudonym 'Angela'. She comes across as very self-confident but there is an uneasiness with herself that also shows through. Let me introduce you to Angela, in her own words;

> I'm a twenty-two year old student who's dissatisfied with her program right now and who's not quite sure what it is she wants to do. I plan to go to Australia for a while...I consider myself to be really caring, pretty outgoing, and a strong woman, although sometimes I have to take a deep breath before I can say that (laughing). (Conversation 1, p.1)

As we talked I found out that Angela comes from a middle class, fairly stable family, one brother and two parents and close grandparents. Her relationship with her family seems fairly normal, there are ups and downs, but most times she is on good terms with them. Angela describes her relationship with her parents as "pretty good." Right now Angela also has a boyfriend, but he lives "half way across the world."

> I've known him for a year and a half, we dated through the summer and I fell in love with him. I knew he was going back sometime, and so he flew home and we have sort of flown back and forth a little bit and we keep in contact daily with E-mail. (Conversation 1, p.1)

This is where I sense Angela's uneasiness with herself, when she talks about relationships with men, her confidence tends to waver, then again, from my perspective, coming from a twenty-two year old this seems to be quite normal. Angela has come a long way in terms of finding out who she is and trusting herself. She has survived the atrocity of being sexually abused as a child and this is Her Story.

Angela's Story

Angela's story begins with her childhood and her memories of her childhood, which are few. When asked about that time of her life, Angela reveals that she, herself doesn't really remember much about that time but rather her memories are of what other

people, family members in particular, have told her she was like.

> Rumor has it that I was a fairly quiet child, really sensitive, introverted, but sometimes I also liked to be the centre of attention. (Conversation 1, p.2)

Although Angela's memories of childhood seem scarce, she did reveal one particular memory that seems significant. This memory divulges a sense of serenity and peacefulness that Angela experienced as a young child.

> I remember we used to have this really big colouring book, and I would like wake up really early, before school, to sit in the front room and colour this colouring book and watch the snow fall. (Conversation 1, p.2)

For Angela, this was kind of like the calm before the storm. As Angela tells her story of being sexually abused as a young 6 year old, this is the child I mourn for, the child who takes pleasure in colouring in her book, while the snow falls silently.

> I remember from counting back and talking with my mother, I guess when I turned 7 I had this incredible mood change. I went from being 6 years old, a happy kid, I went from being fairly normal to bed-wetting, being sad and stuff like that, so counting back, I figure it must have happened when I was 6 or 7. I do know that it was at a family reunion, in my grandparent's house, on their farm. I just remember three incidences during that weekend. I have these two cousins, I was the oldest of the second wave of grandchildren, there was me, this cousin Kathy, and there was this cousin Jane, and we were all two weeks apart.
>
> I was down there and they wouldn't play with me because they grew up together down there and most of my mother's family lived down in the South. And so this weekend that I was down there, the kids weren't playing with me and I didn't really feel like playing with the boys. All I remember is that my cousin Blake, who is old enough to know better, he was in his teens, I don't know exactly how old, he kept playing with me and I don't know the whole situation, like how we ended up in the same areas together, I don't remember if he was stalking me or if I really went to him or what. But I remember one incident where he held me down, on a bed, in my grandmother's house, upstairs, you had to go up these really, really narrow stairs, and I never liked going up there. He laid me down and I remember him touching me from my head, sort of like going down, but after my shoulders I don't remember anything, but I do remember being pinned down. And then I remember being pinned down behind the outhouse, again he started out touching me from my head, shoulders, and then I don't remember anything else. I also remember a third time, we were sitting on the verandah, at my grandmother's house, we were sitting on these desks, he was sitting on this desk, like an old sort of desk and he kept asking me to sit on his lap and I know that he had said that a couple of times, "Come here and sit on my lap," and then I ended up on his

> lap somehow, and again I remembered him touching me from my head, and then after my shoulders. I don't remember but you know it would be silly to think that I would have had all sorts of problems if he just touched my head and my shoulder, so I don't remember anything else but I don't think that it was quite so innocent. (Conversation 1, p.3-4)

Although Angela may not remember specifically what was done to her in detail, it is apparent that she was remarkably effected by these instances of unwanted touching. It is even highly likely that Angela may have been a victim of attempted rape or rape itself as further details of her story unfold. In retrospect it is clear that Angela's mother also believes she was raped;

> My mother's a nurse and she said that the problems I experienced as a child, like bed wetting and chronic yeast infections could have been symptomatic of a rape or an attempted rape. (Conversation 1, p.4-5)

This example is really only one indication that something significant has happened to Angela during that reunion weekend at her grandmother's. After the age of 7, Angela had a troubled childhood and experienced some social problems in her teens.

> I remember being very depressed. I was very depressed. I had very few friends, a lot of people thought I was a snob, just because I was very shy. So I didn't really want to talk much or I didn't have much to say, or I don't know, especially with boys, I was really standoffish with boys...I don't remember being really happy. (Conversation 1, p.3)

It seems as though, whether or not Angela consciously recognized something had happened to her at that farmhouse, that subconsciously it was always in the back of her mind.

> I remember as I got older, really being very aware of Blake, being very wary of Blake, being very on edge whenever he was mentioned. My mother had a picture of him and I didn't ever look at it. There was something about him that just sort of drove me nuts. (Conversation 1, p.5)

It appears as though Angela knew there was something not quite right with her but she just couldn't put her finger on it until she was about 14 years old, when for the very first time, she disclosed, although I don't think Angela sees this disclosure as a conscious decision.

> I had just turned 14, I had this, for lack of a better term, I called him a beau, his name was Jason, and nothing could have ever happened between us because he was 3 or 4 years older than me. He lived six

houses down the street from in the neighborhood. He was in grade 12 and his friends didn't like the fact that he liked a girl that was so young, and my friends thought it was really cool, you know that a highschool boy was interested in me, so nothing ever really happened between the two of us just because of the whole age difference. But we still hung out a lot, we would go for walks and stuff like that, he would buy me a pop and whatever.

It was this one day that we went for a walk and Blake and his family were in town and they were staying at my house and Jason was going to take me home because I had to be home by 10:00. My parents didn't really like him very much, he was kind of a weird flake, especially looking back now. They didn't like me being out with him but I was a rebellious teenager. We were sitting, there was a strip mall a couple of blocks away from our house and we were sitting underneath this archway, and he said, "you know we should get you home," and he looked at me and I said, "No, I can't go home, the person that raped me is..." and he looked at me and I said, "Oh, strike that comment please, take me home." He looked at me and didn't really say much and not that I really blame him but that was the first time that I had ever said anything....I was 14 and it just came out of my mouth, even before I could even think about it. (Conversation 1, p.6)

Having Blake stay at her house appeared to give Angela the trigger, at least subconsciously, to admit verbally that something wrong had been done to her. Little did she know at the time that this first disclosure was just the beginning of several more to come. Angela's future experiences with disclosure, however, were more conscious decisions.

I was 17 and I was working out at a waterfront girl guide camp. I got my training as a lifeguard and a swimming instructor. I got my first job as a lifeguard out at the lake and there were two other girls I was living with when I was out there. One was Nicole and she was 19, and the second one was Joyce and she was like 22 or 24. It was the summer before I was going into grade12 and Nicole and I got along really, really well but Joyce was kind of really standoffish. There was something about her that I just couldn't quite peg, she was kind of rough around the edges and she didn't really appeal to my delicate sensibilities.

There was this one day, it was just me and Joyce and we were staying at the house...Nicole had gone home for the week, and I was like "Oh, God, now I have to live with Joyce," and the first night, I don't remember how it happened but we just started talking and I started telling what had happened and I started crying and she was like, "well, I understand," and then she started telling me what had happened to her.

So anyway after that, we got along quite well actually, and we could both sort of see where the other was coming from. As I got to know her

> over the summer, more and more came out and I talked to her more about it and stuff like that. By the end of the summer, we were pretty good friends, actually quite good friends, she was going for counseling and one day she asked me to come along with her. (Conversation 1, p.6-7)

Angela's first experiences of disclosure were with friends and these seemed to give her the courage to then deal with telling her family and, in particular, her mother. Disclosing to her mother not only may have given Angela a closer relationship with her but it also revealed some memories about herself that she may have found difficult at first to accept.

> There was this one day when my mum and I were driving to the mall and my mother said, "You were sexually abused as a child weren't you?" and I said, "No, mum what are you talking about?" She goes, "I know and I bet I could tell you who did it," and I said, "Oh no, no, no, you've got to be joking," and she says, "I know, because you've been going to counseling." I said, "Oh, no, no, what on earth are you talking about?" and she said, "I can tell." She listed all of these examples of how she could see the change in me from being incredibly depressed in grade 11 and suicidal and slicing my wrists, I would slash and not really cut far down but I would come out of the shower and my legs would be just like, and my arms and that, I would walk into the bedroom with blood dripping on the floor. I just did some really weird stuff when I was depressed.
>
> I joined a modeling agency and they called me up one day because they wanted me to model, and it's not very often that people call you up and say, "Hi, we want you to model." and I told them to fuck off. "Go to hell and fuck off!" When I got off the phone, my parents said, "What's wrong with you?"
>
> So my mother said that she could like, she said you were doing this and now I can see that instead you are doing this, so I was like, "What are you talking about, you don't know a damn thing!" and she was like, "No, I know who did it to you, it was either John or it was Blake." John is her brother that's one year older than her and he's a pedophile.
>
> She goes, "I can tell by your face it was Blake." I was like, "What are you talking about?" and she said, "because his father attempted to rape me when I was your age." And she goes, "you were raped by him." She assumes that I was raped by him...And so I was like, "Well O.K., maybe you're right."
>
> We did the mother/daughter bonding/crying thing and she said, "you know, we'll get you help, you've been going for help, but we'll get you more help, we'll do whatever it takes to help you." She's like, "and I'm thinking of going for help," because she had just recently started to have flashbacks about John and so she was telling me, not really in-depth, but that he had tried to attack her, and when she got away

> from him, she told her mother, and her mother called her a lying bitch and so she just sort of shoved it under her brain and didn't really think about it. (Conversation 1, p.7-8)

Angela appeared to learn a lot about herself and her mother through this disclosure. In our conversations, she indicated that she, herself, never remembered mutilating herself in the shower or telling the modeling agency to "fuck off." Although learning these things about her behaviour must have been difficult, she appears to have a better understanding of herself because of the experience. Her relationship with her mother also seems to have benefited from the experience.

> My mother one night when I was crying and crying and couldn't go to sleep, my mother and I sat in the front room and she held me, it was the first time I let her hold me in a long time, because nobody could touch me, if my brother would tease me by going 'tap' (touching herself) and I would just flip and he did it to tease me, and it was really making me feel uncomfortable. My mother finally could hold me and she's like "It's so nice to actually be able to hold my daughter now, because I haven't been able to hold you since you were a child." (Conversation 1, p.9)

In my view, Angela's life has not been the same since her first experiences with disclosure, her relationships even within her own family have changed and I think she seems now more aware of who she is. Although relationships with boys were still difficult, Angela knew where her pain was coming from.

> I met him before grad, we had an awesome summer, and it was really cool, and then in August our first sexual encounter...we were undressed and he was fingering me and I just yelled out "Stop Blake, Stop!" And his name was Chris and he's like, "What?" and I started crying, balling and he's going, "What the hell is wrong?" I was like, oh boy, here we go again...this is what happened...and this is what I'm trying to deal with... and I went home.
>
> So then I started going for therapy again. I mean I was doing all right, and life went on as usual. At that point in time I had sort of come to terms with what I was, I had felt that I could deal with it at that point in time. (Conversation 1, p.11)

Although Angela did have some sexuality issues to deal with as well as some relationship issues with boys, she survived. When she needed to, Angela saw a therapist and she also confided in friends for additional support. Just because she disclosed did not mean that all of her problems suddenly went away, in a sense it was the beginning of a

long journey which was ongoing.

> I had started to, I was starting to sort of deal with my sexuality because Chris was getting really upset because I couldn't, his penis just would not go into me. It's like when the muscles just wouldn't, it wouldn't go in. He was having problems with the fact that we couldn't have sex, but I was like, "I don't want to have sex," and I was starting to question my sexuality period and I was like, "O.K., this is too scary," and so I stopped seeing Iris (her therapist) because it just got to be way too much. At that point I was also dealing with Anorexia, so I dumped her. I broke up with Chris eventually, we are no longer engaged because he went psycho on me. I was getting bored of him and the relationship just wasn't working out and he was pressuring me for sex, and again maybe, I don't know, I don't like to attribute the assault to everything that happens in my life, yet I think it does effect everything that happens in my life, especially the way I seem to deal with men.
>
> And sex, at that point in time, it's like, "O.K., no I'm sorry, it still won't go in so we'll just have to have oral sex and fool around and do other stuff." And I guess he was having a hard time with it and I guess he was cheating on me with some other girl who could fully function as a sexual woman. So I met this other guy, which is interesting, I was having sexual feelings for him which was really cool at the time because I hadn't ever had sexual feelings for anybody, like not even Chris.
>
> Now I have come to terms with it, I think I am mostly heterosexual but with homosexual tendencies. And so, I was very confused about how I was feeling about women and other people. (Conversation 1, p.11-12)

Learning about one's own sexuality as a teen is difficult enough without the added pressure of dealing with a childhood traumatic sexual encounter. Although I'm sure many of the feelings that Angela dealt with were typical of most teenagers, her freedom to explore sexuality was hampered by feelings of self-doubt and a lack of trust that seem to be quite normal considering her traumatic introduction to power and sex as a young child. Angela has come a long way since that first disclosure at age 15, and as a young woman now at age 22, there will be many more issues that will arise as she continues to grow and mature.

I then asked Angela what kind of meaning that her experiences with disclosure brought to her life, and she responded with the following;

> Well, it's definitely sort of closed a chapter in my life, well it hasn't totally closed it but I've sort of left something behind, a part of life that I wouldn't take back because it's made me who I am but I sure as hell would never want to go through that again and I wouldn't wish it on anybody.

(Conversation 1, p.13)

In talking to Angela I had the feeling that she was glad that she had disclosed but perhaps she would have preferred that it had happened differently. Angela had told me a story of a funeral that she attended for a family member and at that funeral the word spread that she had been sexually assaulted by Blake who was also at the funeral. Her reactions on that experience are as follows;

> I was very resentful of my uncle saying, "Why didn't you ever tell us before?" You know, I guess I was just very resentful to the fact that everybody was shooting all of these questions at me at once...I guess I would have preferred just sort of you know telling people that I had trusted, people that I had chosen to tell. (Conversation 1, p.13)

It is apparent that Angela would have liked a little more control over that situation but overall her feeling was that she had taken some weight off of her shoulders. In terms of her immediate family, Angela felt she could have used a little more constructive support.

> I'm happy with the way my mum had did it, like all of it, because she was going through similar feelings at the same time. I would have preferred that she would have gotten her own therapist some days, I also probably would have preferred that we had family counseling, all of us, dealing with me, because we had that with my brother, but his problems were biological in nature and mine were sort of like environmental. It wasn't something I was born with, it was something that had happened to me and I would have really liked it if my dad was a little more vocal about it. He's really quiet though, it's just the way he is, and the way he shows support is by handing over a cheque, and there's no use in me being upset about it. Still, I would love for him to be more supportive vocally, but I've tried and he's not and so I have done my part. (Conversation 1, p.14)

We all know that we can't choose our parents and I think that Angela really started to see her parents as human beings, with faults, from this experience. We all do the best we can with the knowledge and strength of what we have, and sometimes that just is not good enough. Angela says some really important things about disclosure through her stories, the difficulty of breaking the silence and then trusting those who have been told to be supportive. Some last thoughts on disclosure from Angela in terms of choosing a confidante.

> Trust, and you would have to feel safe, you have to feel that they will validate your story, that they will understand and that they won't be judgmental, they can't be egotistical and think, well you didn't

> tell me and why not? I think it's important to tell when you're ready, but not before, and if you're never ready, then don't tell. (Conversation 1, p.14-15)

At the beginning of our conversations, Angela described herself as a strong woman. She has survived being sexually assaulted by her cousin and she has overcome many obstacles such as depression, Anorexia, and self-mutilation. Disclosure was not an end for Angela but rather a beginning of a journey on the road to becoming a strong woman, both inside and out.

Chapter 6

To Be Courageous

The first time I had contact with Valeria was on the phone. I had made up some posters about my study and in addition to putting them up around campus, I also gave some to my friends and colleagues. Valeria found out about my study from one of my friends or colleagues. She phoned me and we talked about what kind of questions I would be asking her in our conversations and then Valeria informed that she indeed would like to participate in my study. Over the phone, Valeria sounded very together and strong in the sense that she knew what questions she wanted to ask me and she was very forthright. When I met Valeria in person, I found out that I was not deceived. My first impression of her is of a blond, athletic looking, strong woman. Her facial features were strong and defined and she seemed to be full of energy. We laughed quite a bit in our conversations and Valeria had a beautiful, hearty laugh.

I have chosen the name Valeria for this participant because it means 'healthy' and 'strong' (Attwater, 1939). I really could not describe her any better. Let me introduce you to Valeria in her own words:

> I'm 24 years old and I work in a daycare. I have worked in daycare for 10 years, as well as going back to school and finishing up my early childhood development. I like to travel a lot and so I took off for a year after college, to Europe, by myself, and that was a pretty fun experience. And I traveled all the way through Canada by myself and Hawaii.
>
> I have a brother, a sister, a mother, my dad died when I was really little so that's my nuclear family. I moved out when I was 14 and so I haven't lived at home for awhile, about 10 years now. Also in-between doing daycare, I've done every other job under the sun, I've worked restaurants, I've done catering, I've done sales positions, selling paintings door to door and I've done Pizza Hut in London and that was fun. (Conversation 1, p.1)

I think I underestimated Valeria in my journal when I wrote;

> My impression of Valeria is that she is very independent. (Journal entry, Jan. 16, 1997)

Not only is Valeria independent, but she is very smart, funny and self-confident. However I also sensed that she was vulnerable in a way, and when she described how she thought her friends viewed her, I think I gained a sense of another side to Valeria.

> Hard on the outside, soft on the inside (laughing). They always say that I'm just like an oxymoron, like everything about me is...I possess both gametes of every spectrum. I can be very tough but I can also be very soft. My friends just often go, "and here you are, you know you can be serious and have these serious conversations and blow my mind out to here and then suddenly you be a goof and we can't say a serious thing without you laughing your head off." Just the total opposites you know, like I can have intellectual conversations or I can just be a freak or a goof. What else would they say....fairly easily distractible, fairly short attention span at times, very much like a small two-year old. I get tantalized by new ideas and people and often ideas and as soon as it comes into my world, my attention just goes (whoop) and I'm gone. (Conversation 1, p.2)

I think for myself, I was struck by Valeria's independence, her courage, and her intelligence in spite of suffering repeated sexual abuse from her grandfather. She has really accomplished a lot and I don't think that she realizes how much she has overcome in only 24 years of life. Her Story really opened my eyes to the resilience of the human spirit.

Valeria's Story

Valeria describes her early childhood as a very happy time until her father passed away at the age of eight. This seems to be the time that her life took a new direction. I wonder if Valeria describing herself as a two-year old is a reflection of how precious that time was to her and the feelings that she associates with that time.

> I was very much into philosophy when I was a little child and I was an early reader. It was very much encouraged in my house to read. I would say, "mum can you read this to me?" and the response was, "No, you can read it to yourself." But I was only 2 or 3. So I started reading and I read everything on my mum's bookshelves and then I read everything on my dad's bookshelves, so I'm reading 'Roots' you know by the time I was 5 or 6 years old and you know going through books like that, the bigger the better. I had all these ideas, and people and places in my head. (Conversation 1, p.2)

Not only was Valeria reading at a very young age, but she was also having lots of fun with

her friends, playing sports and basically acting like a playful child.

> I had lots of friends, we played lots of sports like soccer and tag, roller-skating and chicken with cars on bicycles. I think we used to do those sorts of crazy things, we used to roller-skate down this hill, my house was at the top of a hill and then when you got to the bottom there was 4 lanes of traffic coming through here and we used to just like, me and my best friend we would hold hands and just skate down the middle of the road and saying, "I hope the cars stop today." (laughing) I didn't sleep very much as a child either and that drove my parents nuts, well my mother anyways. (Conversation 1, p.3)

And then came the turning point, Valeria's father died suddenly when she was only 8 years old. This would have been very difficult for any child and for Valeria it was heartbreaking. She described her father as her 'best friend', and she described herself at that time as 'daddy's girl'.

> He was never sick and then after a few weeks of this illness, they didn't know what to do with him and they didn't know what it was. Then he went to the hospital for a week and he slipped into a coma and then with an autopsy they found out what it was afterwards. So it wasn't like they knew anything so I carried a lot of anger for the medical profession, and God, and you know pretty much all of human kind at that point. (Conversation 1, p.3)

Little did this 8 year old know then that this was just the beginning of her series of obstacles to overcome. Next came junior high and the trials and tribulations of fitting in with all of the rest of the other young teens at her school. Valeria describes her early teen years as 'absolute hell'.

> I was fairly angry ever since my father died and so when I went into grade 7 and 8, I wasn't the nicest girl you could ever know and I was odd because I was fully developed by the time I was 10 years old. I was as big as most of my teachers, if not bigger and so it was very odd, kids treated me strange and plus, "her dad died" (whispering). You know then a couple of my good friends were a bit flippant because they didn't know what to do with me, they didn't know what to talk about because I wanted to get deep into this dark funk that I was in and I wanted someone to join me there. But no one would know what to say to me and so I didn't have many friends at school.
>
> So I became an alcoholic at the age of 8 after my father died, just because my friend was an alcoholic as well and his parents were and so it was good to go into denial about everything, cause it just

> numbed everything else, all through junior high I was just numbed out. (Conversation 1, p.4)

As was stated earlier, the age of 8 was a significant turning point in Valeria's life. Her father died and she dealt with the grief by turning to alcohol and at the same time she started to be sexually abused by her grandfather when her family went to her grandparent's place to stay for holidays and vacations.

> We were staying with her (mother) parents in the summer time, after he had passed away I felt that I was still 8 but maybe I had just turned 9 perhaps. He would hear me crying in my bed at night and he just said, "oh well, come into my bed," and this sort of thing and that's how it all began and at first it was like, finally someone's here to comfort me because my mum wasn't here for me really because she had so much of her own grief and my siblings well they were so young, they didn't know what the heck was going on.
>
> The times that it happened were the times we went down there for family vacations. So you know when I was 8 and then Christmas vacation and summer vacation and then Christmas vacation, you know then when I was 9, 10, 11, 12,... Well and then that went on until I was 13 and then of course I moved out and then I was working, I could work throughout Christmas vacation and summer.
>
> They always seemed fairly fine to me as children, my grandpa drank too much and swore too much and you know told gross stories sometimes but you know they were O.K. as grandparents. (Conversation 1, p.5)

This is how it all started to happen. As her family started to spend more time with her grandparents after her father's death, she then became a victim of sexual abuse by an adult to whom she thought was there to comfort her. Although only 8 years old and suffering from grief, Valeria knew what her grandpa was doing to her was hurting her and that it was wrong.

> I knew quite soon afterwards, like soon after the first time. I realized I was having these out of body experiences and I knew that it wasn't right but I didn't know how to say No. I didn't know how to stop it, he threatened me as well and he said, "No one will believe you anyways because you're a kid." And I knew that was fairly true. (Conversation 1, page, 6)

This was just the beginning of many hard years to come for Valeria. On top of feeling the guilt and the shame of being sexually abused by her grandfather, Valeria had to deal with her growing addiction to alcohol, learning to live independently at the age of 13,

as well as dealing with being revictimized and raped at the age of 15. She also admits that depression and suicide attempts were also everyday hurdles.

> I tried to kill myself, like a lot. I felt just horrible all the time. As soon as you start drinking alcohol, it's such a depressant on the body system and I also had very irregular menstrual cycles, so my mother put me on the pill when I was 9 or 10 years old. (Conversation 1, p. 15)

Valeria also talks openly about moving out at the young age of 13 years old.

> My mum is very controlling, that was the major factor. She said, "you can't" and I said, "I've already moved my furniture". It was way easier, I was going to school, having a full-time job, a boyfriend, lots of friends, and still seeing my family. My brother and sister came to stay with me on weekends because my mum was, like I was pretty much the parental figure after my father died, so I had really broad shoulders and I just took everything on. I didn't find it very hard though because I was in my world, this is my territory, I had this control now. Suddenly my life was not dictated by what my mother wanted to see. (Conversation 1, p.15)

Because of her father's death, it seems that Valeria took on a lot of adult responsibilities starting at the age of 8. There were few people around to take care of her and when she did trust someone, like her grandfather, he took advantage of her innocence. And like many survivors of sexual abuse, Valeria was revictimized when she was 15 by two teenage boys.

> It must have been in grade 10. I got together with a couple of junior high friends and I was going through one of my low points again in my life. I had given up drinking when I was 14 or 15 because my boyfriend asked me to and so I did. I just cut it off cold turkey. And then these people had a keg and so I went over to their place and they raped me later that night and I didn't remember. I've never been sick from drinking, I have such a high tolerance for alcohol that I found it so peculiar that I was throwing up this day and so I couldn't recall anything.
>
> They took me back home and then I just called them later on, and said, "what the heck happened?" and they told me, "well don't you remember, we fucked you." (Conversation 1, p.6)

To Valeria, I think this incident was just one of the many obstacles she had to overcome along the way, no more or less than all the others. By the age of 15, Valeria had already gotten herself out of the situation where she was being sexually abused by her grandfather, she had quit drinking on her own, and she had established an independence way beyond

her years.

In terms of disclosure, Valeria's first confidante was her boyfriend. Although she does not see this as a major disclosure, it was still an important one.

> I must have told my boyfriend before anything. I'm pretty sure I told him but it didn't seem like too much of a disclosure to me, I don't know why...He (boyfriend) was just furious at my grandfather and very supportive. If we were having sex or anything I always had all these things I had to do, so I had to tell him about the whole thing. I had to tell him, "you have to leave the lights on, I have to see who you are," you know this whole thing.
>
> It's always been very easy for me to tell my friends and even to tell him about that situation because I felt that I hadn't done anything wrong in that situation. The thing when I was with people my peer age and I had been drinking too much, I felt that that was part of my fault. I still don't think it (rape) should have been done to me but I still felt worse about that whole situation. (Conversation 1, p.8)

That was Valeria's first disclosure and she indicated to me that it went fairly well, she felt that her boyfriend was very supportive. Her next disclosure was to a close aunt and this was what Valeria describes as being her "main disclosure", most likely because the risk was greater. Disclosing to family members will often result in some kind of ramifications, either to the perpetrator or to other family members. This was also true for Valeria.

> I remember this as being the main disclosure because that's what set it off to the whole family. Like with friends and boyfriends, it doesn't seem connected to the family or the world or my world at all, their just part of my support group, their on my side, they know me first, they love me, they have no ties to the rest of the family. (Conversation 1, p.8)

Valeria has just nicely summed up the difference between disclosing to family and to friends, especially when the abuse has taken place within the family by a family member. It takes a lot of courage to disclose to one's family.

> My aunty got married for the second time so these children of her new husband aren't really my cousins but they were married into the family. I looked at them as my cousins and I used to baby-sit for her because I was about 15 or 16 at the time. I didn't tell my aunty, I told the girls. I said, "you know I'm not going to tell you a lot of details, I'm not going to try and scare you..", but I knew my new cousin, she was going down to stay with my grandparents, and I knew, I just knew my grandfather and I had this feeling that he couldn't keep his hands off of any girl,

> so I knew I had to tell her before she left. I just remember a sense of urgency and I knew how old she was, 8, you know a young girl, innocent and that was not any part of her reality whatsoever, so they were scared, so scared when I told them. I just said, "I'm not going to tell you a whole lot about this whole situation but I need you to be very careful, I need you to watch yourself around all sorts of people, you need to take care of yourself first. And remember that I am a person you can always talk to and I will always believe anything you say about any adult, I will never believe an adult over you."
>
> Well she went screaming off to my aunty. The next day I got this phone call from my aunty, "what are you doing to the girls, you're scaring them?!" And I'm like, "I'm just protecting them, get off my case!" That brought up my aunty's abuse stuff and I don't think she remembered until I said something about the whole thing.
>
> Well then my aunt went straight to my grandfather and told him to stay away from me, stay away from all the cousins, stay away from every girl, or boy, just stay away from them all, or she was going to Narc on him. She just threatened him at that point and then she waited for a few years and I just stayed clear and she just kept her new daughter clear and everyone was just watching their kids. (Conversation 1, p. 8-9)

Valeria's aunt believed her about her abusive grandfather because she too had been abused by him. Her mother was to find out next but Valeria didn't get quite the response she was looking for.

> So then my aunty waited until, of course, the day my mum was getting married, remarried. So she had to wait until that point to confront him and then my mum or something about it. And then my mum was very choked that I told my aunty before her. That's all I remember her saying, nothing else about the whole situation except for, "why didn't you tell me first, what is so bad about me that you can't talk to me first?" It was like that's not the issue, it's not just the freaking issue. She wanted to know all the details, ya she dragged up all the details, wanted to know every little thing that had happened and then not a word about it, not a word about the whole thing. I don't know what she could have said to make me feel better, but the only thing that she ended up saying at the very end was, "I can't believe you told your aunty, of all people, above me." (Conversation 1, p.10)

Although Valeria loves her mother, her mother was just not able to give the support to her that she needed at that time. It was probably to her benefit that she told her aunt first, however this was not the end of things in the family. Next came the big family meeting where Valeria was courageous enough to face her grandfather and sit with him in the same

room while details of the family's history of sexual abuse were discussed.

> We also had a family meeting because my aunty wasn't really satisfied with the things my grandfather had been saying to her and so she said, "I'm telling mum", which is my grandma and so everyone was saying "No, no, don't tell grandma, just whatever we do, let's not tell grandma because it will break her." I'm thinking to myself, you know my grandma as weak as everyone likes to say she is and as she likes to act sometimes, I know she is probably one of the toughest women, like hard as nails sometimes when she wants to be. Sure enough, she showed herself to be, when she finds out, what does she do, she comes to Edmonton with grandpa and calls a family meeting. Not with the entire family, but with my aunty, myself, my mother, grandma and grandpa.
>
> Everyone was sent out of the house at my mum's place and we sat down and my grandmother conducted it. "All right now you tell your story," she said to my aunty, "you tell us what happened", and she asked for the gory details too and I was like, between her and my mum I thought it was sick. They were asking all these details and my grandfather is over there, my grandmother is just trying to let my aunty talk and my grandfather is interjecting telling her she is a fucking liar, "Shut your fucking mouth!" My grandmother is insisting that she keep going, keep going and these are her two parents on either side of her and so she's compelled to keep going, just balling away. And then she (grandmother) goes, "all right, that's enough, now it's your turn, Valeria." I said, "no God damn way I'm going to talk about this in front of this pig!" I know what he did and I will tell you the details, and he started to pipe up and started jumping down my throat, "oh ya, like these fingers could fit up a girl's vagina", and he's going on like this, just ranting like a mad man and of course I was as well, we are screaming at each other and I just stood up and I was like, "You shut up, I don't ever want to hear from you again, I'm never talking to you and you will never see your grandchildren from me, and if they ask my why they don't get to see their grandfather, I will tell them because he's a sick man and he can't handle himself around little children and this is the last time that you and I are talking!"
>
> I left with my aunty because I knew she would give me a ride back to my apartment and my mum, she's just a wreck. She's the only one who didn't speak out of all of us and she's the biggest wreck of all, just being torn into a million little pieces. (Conversation 1, p.11-12)

I think although this incident was obviously a highly emotional situation for everyone involved, it was somewhat cathartic for Valeria to be able to confront her grandfather with the truth of how he had hurt her. Even though he didn't admit to abusing her, at least she

got to say what was on her mind. I think Valeria's grandmother believed her but she wasn't willing to really support her.

> So that was the end of the meeting and my grandmother came up to me and shook my hand and she said, "I'm sorry these things had to happen to you but he is my husband and he has always been my husband and I know nothing more than this. This is my life, he has been my life for 40 years or more and I can't do anything to change that so have a good life." So I just resigned myself to the fact that you know, basically I had lost a lot of my extended family. (Conversation 1, p.12)

Family relationships are always complicated and it is evident that they are even moreso when there is a perpetrator of sexual abuse in the family. There are always mixed feelings of love and hate for the people you care about who end up betraying your trust. In Valeria's case, not only has she cut off her relationship with her grandfather but the relationship with her grandmother will also never be the same. Even her relationship with her mother is strained as her mother continues to have a relationship with the father that abused her own daughter.

> She asks me, "why can't you just forgive and forget?" I said, "well you know, you make your choice, I make my choice. I think she's either in denial or I don't know what, I'm not exactly sure about her. I've seen him (grandpa) at one or two family functions since I was 17 but I walk past him and I never say anything and my grandmother, I will talk to her sometimes, mostly when my family is staying down there. I have to talk to my grandparents to get through to my mother or my sister, or my brother, because sometimes they go. (Conversation 1, p.13)

When Valeria and I talked about her mother being in some sort of denial, I asked her if she thought her mother was abused also and it turns out that she was probably abused by both parents.

> She has never said one way or the other. She has been physically abused, I know that she has been with like major beatings and stuff like that, from my grandparents, actually both of them, my grandmother as well, they both used to abuse, especially my mother out of all four girls. My mother was pretty much the scapegoat for lots of these things, so she won't speak a word. (Conversation 1, p.11)

It seems obvious that in Valeria's family, there are significant intergenerational patterns of abuse, both sexual and physical. By telling her aunt and confronting her grandparents,

Valeria has taken the first steps toward ending her family's cycle of violence. Her actions and her beliefs are indicative of her survival.

> I have this belief that once you're past the age of 18, you know you're an adult now, and you take responsibility for your life and anything that you haven't made amends for or come to terms with by the time you are 18, it's too late, you know get on with your life and deal with it. (Conversation 1, p.4)

Although Valeria has come along way in overcoming all of the obstacles that were put in her path, she is still currently dealing with some of the ramifications of being sexually abused at such a young age.

> I have a lot of boundary problems because of this whole situation. I know who I am in a way but what exactly do I want? I tend to be more of a pleaser than I would ever like to be. When I'm put into positions, in a sexual relationship with people, I tend not to say anything when things come up that I don't like. That's a big boundary problem for me, it puts me in a really bad position now. A fairly obvious one is sexual knowledge that I shouldn't have had at such an early age, people may look at me and say, oh just 24, she may have had sex for a couple of years. You know and sometimes it's hard to conceptualize the knowledge that I have in this little brain, you know in such a short time in that area, it's so, it's quite vast because I have also had to do lots of work, lots of healing in that area and so I've spent lots of that time having sex. (Conversation 1, p.14)

It is clear that Valeria has done a lot of healing along this journey into young adulthood. Her insights are inspiring, especially when it comes to learning about disclosure. Many survivors do not charge their perpetrators for their crimes and these abusers are never punished by the law. Valeria gives some good insight into why many survivors do not pursue the path that leads to the justice system.

> Most of my friends also wonder why I don't charge him and I just feel like that I have already been through the wringer with my family and I feel like they hate me so much already that I don't know if I could stand much more. It seems like that when you go to court with these things, I would like to do it in a way, in my heart I would like to do it, and I think it's the right thing for people to do, but in another way I think it would be so hard because I wouldn't want my character to be smashed all around and talked about and I'm just not sure if I'm strong enough to do something like that. I was just hoping that he would just die. Not hoping that he would die so much, just thinking that if he did, then I wouldn't have to deal with the whole thing and I just thought to myself, look he has made his own sentence, he

is so sick, he's in the hospital every other month. (Conversation 1, p.16-17)

Taking a family member to court and taking a stranger to court are two totally different experiences. Survivors need to make a choice and that they will inevitably make the best choice for themselves. Understanding this is difficult in current situations. When I asked Valeria what kind of meaning that disclosure has had for her, this was her response.

> A sense of peace in a way because I guess all the time I get verified again and again that yes, it's not my fault. You know I was a little girl and I was in need of consoling and I know that he had his problems too. As much as I dislike what he did, I know that his family was all messed up too, the more I find out about his life.
>
> I can't imagine what it must be like to have it all inside your head and not sharing that with anyone else, because other people can take a lot of the edges off, because your mind tends to play these awful tricks on you. You remember certain things from when you were young and the things that these abusers have told you, especially in incest situations because they were probably people that were very dear to you as a small child, not necessarily, but most of the time. They were either respected or admired or something or loved or all of the above perhaps. Even worse than a perfect stranger, it would be much easier for me to deal with a perfect stranger. But when it's coming from your own family and people that you have been taught and grew up to believe that are supposed to be there. You know even when your friends let you down, and when your work doesn't stand by you and your spouse will leave you but your family , your family will always be there. At least that's what I was brought up to believe.
>
> And so I would recommend disclosure personally, for myself. I know that maybe some people don't need it, maybe they somehow have a way of coming to terms with it on their own, but for me, it's a very integral part of my healing. (Conversation 1, p.17)

I think Valeria is right when she says that we always count on our families to be there for us. They are supposed to be the one constant in our lives, so when that constant falters it is very difficult to pick up the pieces. Again, Valeria has some great insights, her strength and her courage show through in everything that she is and in everything that she has to say.

> I think it's just important that people believe in themselves and not necessarily that they have to make somebody wrong, and somebody the victimizer and get deep into the victim role. I don't really believe in playing that out so much but I think just come to terms with things and realize well this is who I am and this is why I am the way I am.

> Believe in your intuition about things. I think you just cause yourself more pain and heartache if you disbelieve yourself. You just accept things, well this is it and this is what we have to deal with and now I can understand more about why these things went on. (Conversation 1, p.17-18)

Valeria does not perceive herself as a victim. She sees herself as a survivor and she has the strength and courage of a lioness. She also has the wisdom and insight of a wise old owl. She is just 24 years old and her journey through life has been arduous. Yet she seems happy and full of life.

Chapter 7

To Shine

Nita was my third participant and she phoned me at home. I remember that when I talked with her on the phone she sounded a little bit nervous but she also sounded determined to participate in this study. Our conversations were brief over the phone and therefore I was also a little bit anxious when I first met her. I really didn't know what to expect. Nita found out about my study through posters that I had placed around campus a few months earlier. After meeting and talking with Nita, I was so glad that I had put those posters up because I would not have wanted to miss out on meeting her. After the interview I wrote;

> I think so far this interview has impacted me the most emotionally. It seems as though Nita does not have any family support and I can really relate to her pain. I think it took a lot of courage for her to come here and do the interview. I think I see a lot of myself in her or at least I see myself being very similar to her about 4 years ago. (Journal entry, Feb. 1, 1997)

About 4 years ago, I was the same age as Nita and I had also just recently disclosed to my family, her story really moved me, probably because in some places the feelings she had seemed so similar to my own. I chose the pseudonym "Nita" because it means 'shining' and 'pure', both of which I felt were emulated in her (Attwater, 1939). Nita had this kind of innocence about her, yet she was so real, and down to earth. I could sense the strength, the integrity, and the beauty within her but I also recognized that she did not see herself that way. Let me introduce you to Nita in her own words:

> I'm Nita and I'm 22 years old, a student at the University right now and due to my experience of being sexually abused, I would like to work with abused children in the future as part of my career. I can be very strange at times, but I'm very trustworthy, and very down to earth. I'm not really the type of person who does a lot of stuff on the spur of the moment but lately I've been doing a lot of that. Other than that there's really not much. I'm usually a listener rather than a talker with my friends, so whenever they have problems I'm there to listen. That's how it works. (Conversation 1, p.1)

Very much like myself at one point in my life, I sensed that Nita was very much the 'good girl' type where everyone comes to her with problems, she's always reliable and puts other's needs ahead of her own. I say 'was' because Nita has indicated to me that she now is starting to change that part of herself a little bit, and is starting to take care of herself too.

One of the other aspects of Nita's story that is interesting is her close extended family. It is evident that as Nita's story unfolds, her family plays a tremendous part in her experiences with disclosure as well as in her healing journey.

> I come from being raised in a very extended family where uncles and aunts are treated like parents and cousins are treated like brothers and sisters. In my immediate family, where I live right now, I have a younger sister who's 8 years younger and my dad and my mum. As far as extended family is concerned, within the city, there's two sets of aunts and uncles, four cousins and grandparents and that's about it. The rest of it are further out in the country and I have a few that are in the States and some more in Africa, a pretty spread out family. (Conversation 1, p.1)

Out of all the participants in my study, I would say that Nita seems closest to her family, they have a lot of influence on her and therefore her struggles within the family are intense. Nita has survived being sexually abused by a close relative, a cousin who is treated like a brother and a son in her family. She has also survived disclosing this crime to her family which is triumphant in itself. This is Her Story.

Nita's Story

As a child, it is clear that Nita was responsible, shy, and considered very good, the kind of child who rarely gets into trouble.

> I was a very quiet child, very shy, it took me a while to get to know people, the majority of my friends were either family or they were friends of family members. I was very shy but very responsible from a very young age, since I was 8 when my sister was born. I ended up taking care of her more than my parents because both of them had to work, so I spent more time raising my sister and in that way I was very responsible. I was one of those goody, goody, kids where I was good in school and what every mommy and daddy said, I did. That's basically how I was as a kid...until recently I'm a rebel or so it seems (laughing). (Conversation 1, p.1)

Nita was a 'good' child and she was also an innocent child until her cousin took that away from her. He sexually molested her as a young 9 year old, shortly after her sister was born.

> I was sexually molested by my cousin and it was my oldest cousin from my dad's side and I always treated him as a brother. He was always looked highly upon, so to be liked by him or to be taken in and to be included by him, you were accepted by all the other cousins as well. And if he didn't like you, then no one else liked you, so first of all that kept me from telling anyone of what had happened and just the thought of a brother doing this to me, I just couldn't comprehend it so I blocked it out of my mind for a very long time. (Conversation 1, p.2)

There is a misconception in our society that sexual abuse takes place when the perpetrator and the victim are alone. Nita's story debunks this myth as she tells how she was sexually molested by her cousin in a bedroom while her other cousins were also present.

> When my sister was born, my mum was doing morning shifts and my dad was doing night shifts. So what happened was, after my sister was 7 or 8 months old or so, on the weekends, we would go to my cousin's house for a sleepover. This is where all the abuse took place, at my cousin's house. I was around 9 and it went on for a couple of months. It never got as far as rape or penetration, it was a lot of fondling, I remember the last time that it happened.
>
> Normally what happened is when we had sleep-overs we would all sleep in the basement and we would make this makeshift tent out of blankets and we would all sleep underneath it and for some reason I would always end up next to him, regardless of where we had chosen to sleep. And he would wait until he thought I was asleep and I would be scared of him because he was bigger than me, he still is bigger than me. I was scared of what would happen, not just because of his size, but I guess I was just very scared of him, so I would pretend being asleep.
>
> I remember the last time it happened, I woke up to him being on top of me and I could feel him breathing into my face and things just, I don't know I guess that was just it, and I rolled over and he rolled off of me and I just pretended to be asleep. I kept turning the whole night so he wouldn't be able to touch me again.
>
> The next time we had a sleep over, it was at another cousin's house, the aunt I'm close to, and so we were sleeping in their small bedroom downstairs. Normally what we do is we put our beds together and we figure out where everyone's going to sleep and we play some games before we go to bed. So I waited to see where he would sleep and he chose his spot here. We were sleeping in sleeping bags and he chose his spot near the door, so I chose mine on the opposite end of the room near the wall, yet somehow between the time we chose the spots

> and we actually went to bed, he ended up next to me. So I was stuck between him and the wall and I didn't know what to do so I sat there. I was really sleepy, in fact I was the one complaining to go to bed the whole night, but when we got in there and being that he was next to me, I couldn't sleep so I sat there. There was a window making shadows on the wall right next to me, so I sat there making shadow puppets and stuff and I was humming and my cousins are like, "what are you doing?", and I was like, "I'm not sleepy," and they're like, "you've been complaining for the last hour that you were sleepy and now you're not sleepy?" I did everything I could to make sure that everyone knew I was awake and it got to the point where I started getting claustrophobic being stuck between him and the wall. The space between seemed to be getting smaller so I got up and moved and slept by their feet.
>
> I didn't sleep the whole night, I got kicked the whole night but it felt safer than being where I was before. And that day I decided I wouldn't go to anymore cousin get-togethers and I stayed out of the whole thing for about 4 or 5 years and no one really questioned it. I guess they thought it was a phase I was going through or just part of growing up. (Conversation 1, p.6, 8, & 11)

As Nita stated earlier, this cousin was like a brother to her, she looked up to him and admired him as the rest of the family did. Like the other participants, Nita also suffered from depression in her teen years. I also sense that because Nita was shy and most of her friends were connected to her family, she kept a lot of her feelings hidden away inside of herself.

> In my teen years, I got diagnosed with depression. I went on Prozac, went off of it due to pressure at home, saying I shouldn't get hooked on drugs. Then I went to college after highschool, my highschool was very tough, that's the year when a lot of people, especially stars on television and movies were coming out with their claims of childhood sexual abuse and a lot of conversation took place in my home as to my father saying, "they were just looking for attention." And there it was sitting in the back of my mind, no they can't be looking for attention, it's a hard thing to go through. So my grade 12 was very tough, I didn't graduate very well, but I did pull through. I wanted to repeat grade 12 but was refused to be allowed to do that and still live under my parents' roof. It was either go to college or University or get out of the house and I couldn't afford to leave the house, so I got into college and took psychology there. (Conversation 1, p.2)

Although Nita knew in the back of her mind she had been sexually molested, she hadn't really consciously admitted it to herself and she hadn't labeled it as sexual abuse until her

first year at college.

> I took psychology there and one of the classes got me hooked into looking into sexual abuse and rape and stuff like that. And then I remember going to a camp, I was a scout leader at that time, so I went to this guiding camp and I was reading a book and out of nowhere, Boom, it just hit me. I had been sexually abused and it seemed like the world, it stopped, yet it went around, it kept going like I was just within these walls, and within these walls it stopped and everything on the outside kept going. (Conversation 1, p.2)

Nita's experience in college led her to her first experiences with disclosure. Similar to the other participant's stories, she also disclosed to friends first before tackling her family.

> So I kept quiet for a while, there were a couple of friends who were with me at the camp and they noticed the difference but I didn't tell them. I got home and called up my best friend and spilled it all out to her and at that time I decided I need to see someone who doesn't know me, someone who could help me professionally. So I went to see a doctor at the college and she helped me through a lot of things, but I guess coming from a psychology background I knew what steps I had to take in order to get better and so I took those steps and I guess academically or logically, I went ahead and took those steps I had to take, but emotionally I'm still trying to catch up with those steps. (Conversation 1, p.2)

Nita realized she had been sexually abused, disclosed to her friend and then talked to a counselor all in a very short period of time. From there it seemed to snowball. The first member of her family that she told was a close aunt, one she describes as "her best friend in the family."

> I didn't tell my parents right away that I was going for therapy, but one of my friends at camp happens to know my aunt on really good terms so she mentioned to my aunt what had happened at camp. I'm really close to this aunt, she's like my best friend in the family, so this aunt approached me so I told her, "no, everything's fine." I didn't realize who had told her I wasn't feeling well at camp and that girl once again approached me and I told her I was seeking counseling and so she went and she told my aunt again. So my aunt came and picked me up from class and she said, "I've been waiting for you to tell me yourself, but since you're not going to do it, I'm going to tell you I know you are seeing a counselor and I want to know why." I kept quiet for a while, it took me a few hours to let it all out and tell her, at that time I didn't tell her who it was, I just told her it was a member of the family. I think I had her really worried for about 3 days, she went from thinking everyone, from her son to her husband, to my grandparents to my parents. And so it got to the point that I had to tell

> her it was my cousin. And because of the way this aunt is I knew that some point in time my dad would find out that I'm seeing a counselor. (Conversation 1, p.2-3)

It becomes very clear throughout Nita's story, how close her family is and how connected everyone in her life is including her friends to her family. I think once one person knew her story, it was inevitable that her family would have found out eventually. Nita started out cautiously by letting her father know that she was going for counseling. Her close, but complicated relationship with her father is revealed as she tells me about this incident.

> So I told my father that I was seeing a counselor and I guess I was showing signs of withdrawing back into depression at that time because my parents did catch on and my father got worried and he said, "you realize you can talk to me or to your mother," and I said, "well I need to see a psychologist right now and that's just the way it is." And I was willing to tell him but not all the details and he said, "well either you tell me everything, or you tell me nothing." So, fine, "then I won't tell you anything." That brought a lot of tension at home because he knew there was something wrong with me and I knew that he knew there was something wrong with me but we couldn't discuss it. And as a child I've always been a daddy's girl and I've always told daddy everything. Mum and I didn't always get along but dad and I always got along, so that's why there was all the tension in the house. (Conversation 1, p.3)

This I believe was a turning point in Nita's relationship with her father. It seemed to change that day, perhaps she learned about a side of him that she had not seen as a child. This incident, however, did not deter Nita from her mission of surviving. Her next step toward healing was confronting her perpetrator.

> As I developed into my stages that I had to do for my therapy, I decided the first thing I would do was I would confront my abuser because I was finding it really hard to believe that even I would think up something like this. And yet, for this person to have abused me, so I did confront him. I set up a deadline for myself of New Year's and I confronted him. He totally agreed with me, and "yes, I'm sorry I did this to you, I realized a while back and I wanted to confront you but,.." I guess he talked to a friend of his or a counselor at school and they basically told him that if I seemed normal then he shouldn't bring it up because it would disrupt my life so he kept quiet. When I did confront him, he was doing a lot more talking than I was, I just sat there and listened and so he sat there and told me how he was hurting and how it had hurt him too and it was just a mistake of his, like it was normal for a child to make a mistake like that.

> I couldn't understand it, I just couldn't bring myself to say anything to him. And at this time, it was still like he was my older brother, you know, he couldn't have really done this to me intentionally. And then I went home, I kept quiet, I didn't say anything, but then the next step I realized was to tell my parents, especially my father. And naive as I was, I decided to go and mention it to my cousin that I'm going to tell my father just in case my father goes off his rocker and just so my cousin's aware of it.
>
> So I went up to my cousin and I called him aside and we had another conversation and I told him, "look, I am going to tell my father, and from now on, whether you admit it to him or not, I don't care, I am going to tell him." So he spent the first hour telling me that if I went and told the family, I would be breaking it up, but if I had to do that for my recovery then that was fine, the family would break up for me. Total guilt trip, one thing after the other, he went on about how he was being used as a scapegoat for everything that was going wrong in my life. How just because he had a girlfriend and I didn't have a boyfriend that I wanted to blame him for something and ruin his life. He sat there for the first hour and totally tried to degrade me and I just, I held my ground and I was like, "forget it, I'm not the one who ruined the family, I'm not the one who did something wrong." (Conversation 1, p.3-4)

Once Nita's cousin found out she was going to tell her family, it is obvious that he changed his perspective on things. He was no longer the 'nice guy'. In a sense, I think this confrontation gave Nita the motivation to then tell her father. Although she tells me that she is glad that she has told him now, his reactions after the disclosure were not quite what she had expected or anticipated.

> The next day was a Friday and so I sat there and my classes were in the afternoon, so I'm normally home in the morning. My dad works the night shift and he comes home in the morning and he sits for about an hour or two. So I came downstairs and I told my dad, "look, I'm willing to tell you everything about it," and he goes, "O.K.", and so I told him everything. The first words to come out of his mouth were, "are you sure? You realize this is a harsh accusation you are making." And that wasn't what I was expecting to hear from my dad because my dad has dealt with cases of sexual abuse because he's been a teacher in our religious affiliation and so he's dealt with situations like this, so I guess I naturally assumed he would be there to support me for it.
>
> And he said this to me and I was like, where is this coming from? I said, "yes, I am telling the truth, I know it, God knows it. Whether he lies to you I don't care, whether you choose to believe me, I don't care. I know the truth and that's it." I walked out of the house. (Conversation 1, p.4)

I think it is important to remember that in Nita's situation, her cousin was thought of as a son to her parents. He was also the oldest grandchild of her grandparents, he was respected in the family and in a sense he was idolized by the whole family. Technically it comes down to Nita's word against his and knowing this, her disclosure to her family must have been a difficult choice to make, and a brave one.

As I stated earlier, Nita's relationship with her father began to change, which is also evident in the aftereffects of this last disclosure.

> Most of that year was spent away from the house, I spent most of my time at the library until it closed. I got home so my dad wouldn't be home, left in the morning before he got in and I spent a lot of time with a friend of mine who lived on campus. That's how the next year or so was spent, there were quite a few times when I went up to my dad and said, "you're not going to believe me, why not?" His basic response was, "what do you want me to do, do you want me to go to court, is that what you want?" So I kept quiet and I heard it through the grapevine of my family; that my dad's basic reaction to it was that I'm just making all this up to get attention. (Conversation 1, p.4)

Even though Nita had now disclosed to her father and her aunt, it is evident that she felt she still had to keep quiet. The secret in some form was still there because it had not really been acknowledged, by her family, that she had been sexually abused by her cousin. Eventually a few more of her aunts found out by Nita's close aunt, but the situation in the family remained the same. Nita did not want her grandparents to find out either.

> So it was kept quiet again, I told my aunts that I'm not going to tell my grandparents, I'm not going to publicize this, because my grandparents, they think the world of my cousin. You know, he's their first born grandchild, and I'm not going to ruin that for them but the day they die, he's going to hear it, the world is going to hear it, either that or if I ever find out that he's touched any of my other cousins or anyone else, I'm going to speak out. (Conversation 1, p.6)

It seems to me that Nita has already spoken out, yet she just does not feel that she's been heard. Eventually Nita also disclosed to her sister, who was somewhat sympathetic and she did believe Nita, however for Nita, it was her father's reactions and disbelief that she continued to struggle with. On top of that, Nita's mother, who has been largely excluded up until now, found out.

> So my aunt told her, so then my mum knew and her basic reaction was

"just forget about it, it's in the past, just move on with your future and don't ruin your life." So things just got more and more tense at home.

Then in September, I believe, my cousin who abused me announced his engagement. He's in Calgary and the girl he's getting married to is in Calgary, so for the engagement party the family was going up to Calgary, so I basically refused to go. No one knew why I wasn't going, I had my grandparents calling my house every day for 2 weeks, trying to convince me to go, and I was like, "no, I'm not going, I'm staying at home," and I told my dad, "I don't want you to lie for and excuse, if you can't tell the truth as to why I'm not going, send them to me, and I'll tell them the truth." I found out after that weekend that my father's excuse for my not being there was that I had to go to a camp. So that really pissed me off, and I told him, "look, I told you not to lie, but you did anyways, so forget it now." And things got worse and worse and it got to the point where I don't want him (cousin) in my house anymore. To my dad, he still thinks of this cousin as a son and so things got more and more tense. (Conversation 1, p.7)

Nita struggled a lot with her family during that time but she forged ahead and she set another deadline for herself. Again the deadline was New Year's Eve, two years later, and her goal was to disclose to her perpetrator's mother, her aunt. The influences of her religion and her family's cultural beliefs seem to really show through in this next incident.

So I called my aunt into the little bedroom, the spare bedroom and I told her. And she was, basically was quite stunned, very stunned. She goes, "if my son did this to you, why are you bringing this out now?" "Because I couldn't bring it out earlier, I had the courage to bring it out now, so you hear it now." And he just happened to be in town that weekend, and so she called him into the room, and he actually denied the whole thing, except as I replay that night in my head, I realized that he didn't deny it, he didn't really deny it, he used a lot of word play to get himself out of it.

My aunt brought my grandmother into it and I told her, before telling her, I don't want my grandparents into it. And she made me swear on my mother and my grandmother that I was telling the truth. So I did that and my cousin looked quite bewildered, but she didn't make him swear on her. And she just said, "I believe you, don't worry (to her son)."

And so I haven't gone to Church for the past year almost, but my dad, not only is he very religious, but he's seen as a very prominent man in our religion, and so my aunt came up with, "who is she, she doesn't even go to Church every day, her father being so holy and upright, he can't even send her to Church." And so that really pissed me off.

> My aunt before I left said she wanted to talk to my dad, she was going to come over the next day, so just to let my dad know for him not to go to bed. She wanted to talk to him about this, I said, "fine, I don't really care, but I don't want my cousin to step foot in the house," and she's like, "it's not your house, it's your father's house, and the day your father gives that house to you, even I won't step foot in it."
>
> The next day I waited for her to come by, my mum filled my dad in with everything in the morning, so my dad was pretty angry at me for having the audacity to do something like that. So basically he gave me the silent treatment and if looks could kill, I wouldn't be here right now. And that evening I guess people had been called in from Ontario for reinforcements, so his brother from Ontario gives him a call and so my dad's like, "don't worry about it, it's nothing, just Nita wanting attention." And I guess the thing that I hated most about that conversation is that I was sitting right there, not even 2 feet away from him. (Conversation 1, p.9)

It seems like every time Nita disclosed to a family member, she hit a brick wall. It must have been very difficult for her to live in a house where the tension was so thick and where her feelings were not validated or valued. On top of all of this, Nita's next challenge was facing verbal threats from her cousin. Because she disclosed to her aunt, her cousin was now threatening to take her to court.

> So for about a week, my dad didn't talk to me, not anything that was happening with the family conversations, but I would sit and eavesdrop on him and my mum talking. Apparently my cousin had gotten so angry that he threatened to file a law suit against me for ruining his reputation. And my dad basically said that, "I'm not going to pay for...", he wasn't going to pay for me to go to court, if I have to sleep in jail then so be it. The aunt that I'm close to had offered for me to go and spend some time there until things cooled down, and I was going to do that, even though that would cause problems with the family, I knew that I would be safe there. But my mum said that if I were to go there and she died, it would be all my fault. So I wasn't going to take on that extra responsibility, so my mum cornered me one night and she's like, "you know, stuff like this always happens to girls, you have boyfriends before you get married, and sometimes things get out of hand, that's normal, you just forget about it and move on." I looked at her and I go, "it happens between boyfriends and girlfriends, this was my brother, he has no right to do that." (Conversation 1, p.10)

This is where Nita says her story ends because she has told me everything up until the present. Nita's experiences with disclosure have happened very recently and this is all still

fresh for her. She has disclosed to all who are important to her at this time and now she lives through the aftermath.

> Basically, that's how it stands right now, in my mind I don't really have parents and I'm staying in the house because I'm forced to stay there and I'm calling them mum and dad because that's all I know what to call them. And that's basically how it is. My mum asked me to go and apologize to my aunt and my grandparents and I did. I went to my grandmother's 2 weeks ago and I apologized to her, and I had told her, "I'm not apologizing for what I said but I'm apologizing for saying it in your house." Basically I heard my grandmother say, "forget about it, just forget about it." (Conversation 1, p.10)

Although Nita has essentially accepted her situation as it stands, she will probably have some very difficult choices to make in the not so distant future. She has gone through a lot with her family in a very short period of time and in that time her relationships with family members have seriously changed. At the same time, Nita already has some great insights about disclosure that she has shared with me. When I asked her about her experiences of disclosing to her friends, this is what she said.

> They've been more supportive than I ever thought they would be and to me they are more family than my family is, because they have less of a reason to believe me, they don't know me as well as my family supposedly should know me and yet without questioning me, they believe me. It's not just a phase because I know that they believe me, I can tell they believe me and that makes a hell of a lot of difference compared to my mum who says, "ya, I know he's done this to you but you know....", there's always 'buts' there. So I think if it hadn't been for the support of my friends, I don't know where I'd be right now. (Conversation 1, p.13)

Even though Nita's experience with disclosure can be looked at as less positive with her family than with her friends, she indicated to me that she is still glad that she told her family.

> It hurts that the family is taking the stand that they are but I think I needed to be selfish and I needed to know where I stood in my family so even though where I stand hurts, knowing that they think higher of him than they think of me, it's a burden off my chest. I'm not keeping a secret anymore.
>
> So disclosing, ya, I'm glad I did it, though I'm pretty sure a lot of the steps I've taken have just been because of logic or my academic learning, like I have to do this or I have to put myself...,

> yet emotionally every now and then I find I'm still trying to catch up to what I've done. But I think I've made progress because I've gone from calling myself a victim to calling myself a survivor. I'm in remission, like a cancer, I know it's going to keep coming back to haunt me, you know so I'm not totally out of it, it's not out of my system. But that rollercoaster is much easier to live with than the rollercoaster of keeping a secret. (Conversation 1, p.14)

As I listened to Nita, it was so apparent to me how strong she was on the inside, to have processed so much in so little time. Often when she spoke, her voice would waver and I could see tears in her eyes, but she just kept on talking. It was like she needed to tell me all of these things. When I asked what the meaning of disclosure was for her, she responded;

> For me it was a way of finding strength in myself. I've always had a really low self-esteem, in the sense that I guess because I am obese, a lot of it just boiled down to that. You're not pretty enough, you're not skinny enough or whatever and especially in my highschool years because I went from being a total A honour student to being one who was struggling to get through and it really hit my self-esteem badly. And no matter how much people told me, you have this good in you, I was finding it hard to believe in myself.
>
> I feel having made these disclosures, I'm able to stand on my own 2 feet so I'm able to have that self-esteem there for myself. And even if no one else is proud of me, I'm proud of myself for having done what I've done because that means that I do have strength inside of me, and if I can survive through all this, hell world, throw anything at me. (Conversation 1, p.14)

I saw the strength in Nita right away, as well as the purity and innocence of her whole being. I'm glad that she also sees some of that strength within herself. I feel sad though that her closeness with her father and her family has suffered because of disclosure. I think this is also where she feels hit hard the most. As we ended our conversation, again we came back to her father. I asked what she would have preferred her father's reaction to have been.

> For him to say that he believes me but honestly speaking, even if he says that to me now, it won't make a difference. When I needed him to believe me, he didn't. He just, aside from outrightly saying it, he called me a liar, him having raised me, he raised me more than my mum raised me, he should know me long enough to know that I wouldn't lie about something so big. So that's the only thing I

> think of negatively as part of my disclosure. I'm so glad I did it.
> It had to be done, for me it had to be done, it wanted to be done.
> (Conversation 1, p.15)

After our conversation, I left the room feeling so emotionally drained. So many things that Nita had to say triggered my own feelings about disclosure. All I could think of was how brave and how strong she was to have confronted her family the way that she had and then to still be glad that she had disclosed. I called this story, "To Shine" because I feel that Nita's soul really did shine, in everything that she said to me. I could see her shine, and I could see the potential for her to keep on shining into the future.

Chapter 8

To Gain Self-Respect

Monica was my fourth and last participant for this study. She found out about my study through an E-mail message that I had sent out to all graduate students on campus. We had to reschedule the interview a few times but eventually we met and Monica told me her story. Monica is the eldest of all the participants and she has been married for ten years. My first impression of her is of a very intelligent, assertive, strong woman with a maturity about herself that seems beyond her years. She seemed to be so together, emotionally and intellectually, moreso than myself, which I think made me feel a little vulnerable. I felt a little intimidated by her.

As we talked through the interview, I sensed that Monica had always played the role of the 'responsible' one in her family and as the 'counselor' of the family. She was the one in her family with the good head on her shoulders. Thus I have chosen the pseudonym 'Monica' because in Latin it means "counselor" (Attwater, 1939). Let me introduce you to Monica in her own words.

> My name is Monica, right now I'm in graduate studies and I did my undergraduate work at another University and throughout all of that my main interest has been working with survivors. Most likely because of what I've been through but it's also the area I enjoy working in. I'm married, no children, currently caring for my father who is ill. I play football. I'm 29, I'm turning 30 this year. (Conversation 1, p.1)

When I asked Monica how she thought a good friend might describe her, this was her response.

> Outgoing, responsible, organized, learning to be spontaneous, I don't know....fun. (Conversation 1, p.1)

Out of all the participants Monica also has the biggest nuclear family, she has six siblings, three step siblings, two biological parents and a stepfather. This is how she describes her family.

> I'm the fourth of five kids to my mom and dad who separated when I was about 6 and my mom remarried when I was about 9. They entered a common law relationship and they had 2 more kids, so

> that would be seven. The youngest two would be my half siblings and he had 3 kids from a previous marriage so there was ten of us, but the 3 older ones were from his first marriage, we knew them but they never really lived with us or anything. So I kind of consider myself the 4th of 7, but I have a lot of traits of an oldest child because my older siblings had left home at a very young age, so for most of the time, I was pretty much the oldest one at home. (Conversation 1, p.1)

If this is not complicated enough, add sexual abuse and physical abuse into the equation. Monica seemed to have big shoulders at a young age. She carried a lot of weight on them. But she has also carried that weight well and she has survived. This is Her Story.

Monica's Story

As a child, it is clear than Monica is already responsible and very sensible, similar to Nita, she was thought of as a 'good' child.

> I was the good child, I was the overachiever and the peace keeper. I did very well in school, was a straight A student, played sports, did all that kind of thing, a perfectionist I guess, very hard on myself. Other people thought things came easy to me but it was just that I had worked hard in school. Probably school was kind of my haven, my place of achieving, trying to gain a sense of competence. (Conversation 1, p.2)

What struck me most about Monica was her modesty about all of her achievements, including how she dealt with her experiences of sexual abuse and disclosure. She talked very matter of factly about everything as if all she had done had been the most 'normal' thing in the world. This also included her family and her experience of being sexually and physically abused by her stepfather.

> It started when I was about 9 when my stepdad came, it was by him, and continued until I left home until I was about 17, so it pretty much continued right through until then. Mostly it would just involve, JUST, just him touching, there was never any forced intercourse or anything, but it happened quite frequently, on average I would say, I mean if you worked it out, I would say 1-2 times per week throughout that time. I mean it would be more and then he would go away working you know so... (Conversation 1, p.3)

Monica also indicated to me that her older and her younger sister were also abused and she suspects her two youngest siblings, that he fathered, were abused as well. I felt I

wanted to know more about Monica's stepfather so I asked her to tell me a little bit more about him.

> I wouldn't say we got along, we feared him, he was also very physically abusive, he had an explosive temper, yelled a lot, and then was physically abusive. He worked kind of getting any kind of work he could get, brick laying, carpentry, that kind of thing. (Conversation 1, p.3)

It is evident that Monica did not really have a very close relationship with her stepfather which is understandable because she feared him, but she did seem to have a fairly close relationship with her mother during that time. This is how she describes their relationship.

> At that time, I would have described it as being very close, obviously it wasn't but that's how I would have, I mean I felt that way. I guess I protected her, there was a lot of role reversal, I didn't want to give her anything to worry about or cause any problems like older siblings had. So I kind of just assumed being the perfect child, did a lot of caretaking. (Conversation 1, p.3)

As I have stated previously, these are heavy shoulders for a young girl. Yet Monica remained strong and independent, especially in her teen years. She left home at a young age, she worked and put herself through private school, and she continued to be responsible.

> We moved around a lot. I spent a year living in a small community, my stepfather was Russian and I lived in this little community with no electricity, no telephones and that kind of thing for a year and that was when I was in grade 11. Then I left home for grade 12, to Vancouver Island actually, and went to private school there, I grew up in B.C.
>
> I didn't rebel, I continued to be the perfectionist good child. I wanted to leave home but I wasn't about to quit school and run away like my siblings had done. So I applied to private schools and paid my way through private school as a way out, just because that was socially acceptable. (Conversation 1, p.2-3)

As Monica was telling me this story, I could not help but be amazed at her independence at such a young age. I don't think that I have ever heard of a teen that was as responsible and independent as she was. I wonder if Monica, in a sense, missed out on part of her childhood, the part where it seems quite normal to rebel and to just have fun.

> I worked, well from the time I was about 10, I worked as a waitress, we owned a restaurant for awhile, until I was about 12 or 13. And

> because I had experience, I got a job at a summer resort and I would work there and I would baby-sit and I had a paper route, well not a paper route, well I did that when I was younger. I had a job, I wrote a column for a school paper, for the community paper, a school column and that paid and you know so I just kind of kept saving money. And when I did go to private school, I waitressed throughout. (Conversation 1, p.4)

I now understood what Monica meant when she said that she was now learning to be more spontaneous. It seems as though for so many years she couldn't let her guard down, she had to support herself and she was determined to finish school, which meant working a lot at a young age. It must have been difficult for her at that time to just let loose and have fun. Again, in terms of disclosure, Monica was the responsible one, she disclosed to a friend and then to her mother, out of concern not for herself, but for her younger siblings.

> I guess the moment I would think as disclosure, I was 17 then and that was when I met my husband...but anyway we had kind of gone our separate ways and I had gone off to Vancouver Island and was living there. And it was when I was there that I really started to think that I had left 3 little sisters back home, because I pretty much protected them during any of the physical abuse and I started to worry more about them. And then I came back that summer, well I came back for a couple of visits as well, but I came back that summer and went to the place that I had always worked during the summer and I was living there, which is on a lake, so that was a summer resort. So I was living there and knew that I kind of had to do something or say something to my mom and I was going home to where my mom lived, I think it was around her birthday. I had been talking to a friend at the lake who was actually one of my teachers when I was in grade 8, 9, and 10. We had kept in touch and I had told her very loosely about what was going on and I kind of said, "I'm kind of worried about what Paul might be doing to my sisters." So anyway I had spent the night at her place before I was heading home, I was taking the bus home and she had packed me a lunch, and she knew I was going to be trying to talk to my mom about this. I had written this 5 page letter to my mom in case I couldn't say what I wanted to say, and I had picked up a couple of books on safe-proofing kids. Because at this time, I was probably 17, or maybe I was 18, I would have been 18 actually, so my sisters would have been 5 and 6 or somewhere around there. So I picked up books on how to home-proof and safe-proof them and I was going to give them to her about them and I had this letter. So I went home to visit and unbeknownst to me, my friend, in my lunch, which I hadn't eaten, had a box of toffee that she gave me and in there she put a note that said, "Be strong, a lot could depend on it." So I got

> home and I didn't finish my lunch and I bring it out and I'm sharing the candy with my little sisters and the note falls out and so my mom's like, "What's this about, be strong, what do you mean?" And so that was kind of how, and it wasn't, I mean I didn't have the letter handy, it wasn't the space, it wasn't how I wanted it to occur, so I pretty much minimized it... you know, I'm just worried about this and I wanted to mention this and da, da da.
>
> Anyway it was very minimized and as it turned out, my mom and my stepdad had had a fight earlier that week and my mom went in to talk to a lawyer because my stepdad had threatened to take the 2 little girls, which were his kids and my mom's. And he had actually taken them and gone camping and disappeared with them for a couple of days and came back, and dropped them off and went off to work. So this was the first time she actually got scared and had gone into see a lawyer about what were her rights, if he disappeared with the kids, what could she do because she was kind of freaked when he took off with them.
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> So I guess the lawyer had referred her then to somebody else to talk to and she was actually going the next day. So she went and did that and it ended up being a social worker, who then of course wanted, or then asked her, "well do you think there was any sexual abuse?", and she said, "well I don't know, one of my daughters, you know said something." So then he wanted to talk to us, so we went in, well I went in and my younger sister who is 4 years younger than me went in and talked with him, and that was like the first time I was really disclosing and my mom was in the room, the social worker, the police who were supposed to be there weren't there, and so that was pretty much how it went. (Conversation 1, p.4-5)

Monica essentially disclosed 3 times in a very short period of time. Once to her friend, then to her mother and then the social worker. Little did Monica realize at the time that these disclosures would have great ramifications. This was, in essence, just the beginning in terms of her contact with the social and judicial systems in place at the time. After her disclosure to the social worker, this was the response.

> The social worker, from what I remember, there was support but it was more like, get to the facts sort of thing, more of an investigative kind of role. All I remember is just being super aware that my mom was there and so I continued to minimize a lot of it, to take care of her more than anything. (Conversation 1, p.5)

Again Monica assumed the role of the responsible one, somewhat of a parental role with her mother. I assume that it would be very difficult to disclose fully to a stranger when you are trying to protect someone at the same time, who happens to also be in the room.

I wonder if the social worker ever thought of talking to Monica alone? The social worker, however, did act on the information that was given to him.

> Basically, my mom was told that if she went home the two little girls would be apprehended as well as my sister who was 4 years younger. So we all ended up in a safe house that night and my mom was not happy and the police who were not able to be at this meeting wanted to talk to us the next day. So we went in for that interview but between the time we had the first one and the next one, my mom put a lot of pressure on us not to say anything or not to press charges or whatever because there's this whole paranoia that the government is out to get the Russians, and they are trying to, well anyway basically assimilate them into this culture as opposed to theirs, there's a lot of other issues. So my mom turned this whole thing about how the police were trying to get him (stepfather) for anything they could and for us not to say anything.
>
> I don't know what my younger sister did, but basically with the police trying to talk to us alone, and I just kept saying, "well I was told not to say anything because you guys are out to persecute my stepdad," and you know stuff. We answered some of their questions but nothing ever happened with it.
>
> Child welfare still stayed involved and the ministry of social services there, but no criminal charges were laid, but they did keep an open child protection file and my mom couldn't go home and at this time, I was living in, well I was living by the lake but my home was on Vancouver Island. So I went back there for the first year of University and my mom moved out there and got a townhouse, with the three girls. So she moved out there and didn't tell anybody where she was because by this time, she was really afraid that Paul, my stepdad, would come after her. (Conversation 1, p.6)

At this point in the interview, I was confused as to whether Monica's mother actually believed her about the sexual abuse or if her mother had moved her younger siblings for other reasons?

> I think that there was a point in time when she believed me, when she moved to Vancouver Island, I think at first she was just in shock and didn't know what to believe. We had one conversation, I actually took her out for tea and dessert at this little tea house there and we were talking about it..and I can remember in that conversation feeling as though she believed me but it was very short lived, but she was asking questions and you know and she made a comment about how she had no idea, you know to that affect. Now, she thinks I'm lying and made it up and vengeful, but that's how she's convinced herself, but at that point in time there was a moment that I thought she believed me. (Conversation 1, p.6)

It is obvious that Monica's mother also had a lot to deal with at the time, leaving her husband and starting out on her own with 3 children in a new place. However, it is clear to me that Monica still continued to be the responsible one, and essentially acted more like a mother figure to her younger siblings, than her own mother was capable of doing.

> I was the only one in the whole family who knew where she was, so basically we packed up and moved there and I was living in a basement suite. Just because of all the stress and stuff, so I moved out on my own. So she came for about 6 months, or maybe it was for a whole year, child welfare was involved, he (stepfather) wasn't supposed to have any access, but eventually she would start to allow visits.
>
> She started about mid October, she started to go and visit Paul and I would look after the girls because she wasn't allowed, because they weren't allowed to see each other. Then she started to have him over to her place, by this time he had bought her a car and he had really changed. I wasn't convinced. So he started to come over, well actually at first when she would go over and visit and I would look after the girls, they would have nightmares and they would talk to me about things that he did. I knew that if he hadn't already abused them that he was grooming them to, from what they were saying.
>
> So I was quite concerned and was very torn because I didn't want him having access to them. The 2 girls, Heather and Emma, I pretty much raised them to this point, like they were my girls, we did everything together, they would ride my motorbike with me, and they would hang out with me and they would wait for me to come home from school and my husband, who was my boyfriend then, they just loved him. Heather would say, "Oh, Mike is my boyfriend, I'm going to marry him." It was just like we did everything together.
>
> So when Paul started to come and visit mom and the girls, I was quite concerned. You know because these were my own kids, I wasn't about to let this happen. So what I would do is I would phone social services and tell them that he was there visiting. They had apprehended the girls but had left them in custody of my mom under these certain conditions and one of them was no access. So I would phone, and say "you know I know they're not supposed to have access but they are having access and I'm worried." So then a couple of days later they would show up on my mom's doorstep, you know to get her side of the story and my mom always thought the information was coming from the school because the girls were in school and she thought that maybe they were saying something about Papa in school.
>
> And finally child welfare or social services just had nothing they could keep the file open on. So then my mom eventually moved back to the small town and took the girls back there and because of child welfare was still involved, Paul didn't live there, he stayed away and then they got

> supervised visits and then eventually they just got it to where he could come back. (Conversation 1, p.6-7)

In some ways I see Monica as being forced into the mature role or the mother role for her siblings. She felt she had to do something to protect them as her mother obviously wasn't capable or wasn't willing to take on that responsibility. It must have been difficult for Monica to betray her own mother to social services for the better welfare of her siblings. She was a brave young woman. Her boyfriend, now husband, was there to support her through these times. Monica indicated to me that basically she disclosed to her boyfriend around the same time as her mother, out of necessity.

> He was very supportive. He was you know at first angry and wanted to kill him but he was very supportive and very much you know, "I had no idea," and I was, I was just kind of like, "I don't want to get into it, I've had a long week but this is what it's about." But he was great. (Conversation 1, p.8)

Although Monica had a supportive boyfriend at the time and she did manage to stay strong for her siblings, she did suffer personally. Like the other participants in this study, Monica also suffered from bouts of depression and thoughts of suicide.

> So then I was in first year of University the whole year that mom was living there and I was going nuts trying to decide whether I should go to the police or not and at that point I was quite suicidal, quite depressed. I had told a couple of friends at school what was going on, trying to sort out what to do, I had received some brief counseling at the sexual assault centre. So I ended up in some short term counseling there and spent a lot of time just trying to sort out what to do, and basically through most of that year, really struggled with that. (Conversation 1, p.8)

During this time was also the beginning of the downfall of Monica's relationship with her mother. She loved her mother but couldn't go along with her mother's decisions about raising her siblings. She was pulled in both directions.

> And at that point, I went to mom and told mom I was going to make a statement to the police and she totally disowned me. She said, well the last thing she said to me was "have a nice life," and slammed the door on my face. And so from that, I couldn't deal with that because I was totally enmeshed with my mother and from that I took the statement, the forms that I was going to write my statement on for the police, and I wrote her a letter apologizing and saying why and doing all that stuff and trying to fix things because I was the peace keeper, and I managed on

some level to patch things up. (Conversation 1, p.8)

That next summer, Monica got engaged to her boyfriend and continued on with her life, although she was still worried about her little sisters. Monica and her now fiancé decided to take a pre-marital honeymoon and they ventured to the United States to visit Monica's older step-siblings. During that trip, Monica and her step-siblings came to the conclusion that Paul would never change and so they decided to press charges against him, in order to protect the 2 youngest siblings.

> We had decided, they were all coming up for our wedding in July of '87 and we decided that after the wedding we would do it. I was getting married, I was having my honeymoon and then we would deal with it. I said, "look, I don't want any of this to get out before my wedding because she (mother) had already disowned me once. So it was all hush, hush before the wedding and as it turned out, my older sister started talking to my step sister about it and I think mom caught on because we were having all of these secret meetings. Anyway my mom got wind of it at the wedding, so we called it off again and then in September, I just went ahead and did it anyway.
>
> Not on my own, I just phoned my sisters and said that I can't live with knowing that Heather and Emma might be being abused and that I'm prepared to do this and that I'm going and I'm making these statements and I could really use your support but it's up to you, but I can't live with this. Because now I had spent 2 years basically on a rollercoaster, being suicidal, and trying to plan a wedding and it just was not working. (Conversation 1, p.9)

And so Monica did make her statements to the police, again she played the role of the responsible and care-taking one in the family. Out of all of the participants so far, Monica is the only one who decided to take her perpetrator to court. This is not necessarily a positive or a negative statement, just a statement of fact. Her experience gives us all an idea of the process, and the positive as well as the negative ramifications that resulted from that decision.

> We made statements to the police and then there was a bit of an investigation and then within a couple of weeks mom was informed. The girls were questioned and they didn't disclose anything, they were placed in a foster home. I'm not sure where mom was, mom wouldn't talk to me anymore, she disowned me as I expected. The girls didn't disclose, my mom eventually got them back but she had to leave Paul again. She moved, got a place of her own, and got the kids back and still maintained a relationship with Paul but again it had to be supervised.

> And then the investigation took quite a long time, particularly because we had lived in so many different places, there was a lot that had to be done. (Conversation 1, p.9)

After the investigation, Monica had to go to court and testify in a preliminary hearing and in the actual trial. She was also still attending University at the time. She described that time of her life for me.

> I'm in my second year of University, I got into University through a scholarship and it was renewable if your grades were so high, the first year was like a right off, you needed a 7.5 to get it automatically renewed and I had like a 7.1 and so I applied and just told them everything that was going on and so they renewed it. And so the next year I was still struggling to keep my grades up to stay in school and I was flying out to the trials. I was being flown out to testify in-between midterms and finals. (Conversation 1, p.10)

A rollercoaster of a life indeed. Not only was Monica struggling to keep her grades high enough for a scholarship but she also had to face a trial, where she would have to testify in front of both her mother and her stepfather. She was also under the added pressure of being told that her testimony would be the most critical out of all who would testify.

> The trials were, I was pretty much the main witness, the most solid and most credible and you know they made no mistake of telling me that everything kind of hinged on mine. I was the most organized and you know has the least agenda and sort of thing. My oldest sister, in her zealousness to make sure he would be convicted, lied in one of her statements and then retracted so that shed doubt on her credibility. My younger sister, you could say wasn't the most organized person, and she was pretty young at the time so she didn't come across very well and wasn't as responsible. Both of my sisters quit school at an early age, I mean they just weren't as credible, they had you know pasts that involved drugs and stuff like that, so their testimony certainly helped to fill in the blanks but... So they were involved also, my stepsister testified about the physical abuse in the trials, and his (stepfather's) son testified that one time he had walked in on Paul and my younger sister, didn't really see too much but saw a bit and Paul threatened him and then he just left again, so he testified about that which helped.
>
> The criminal trial dragged on forever, it was very strange sitting there because if you didn't know the story he sounded so convincing because he took the stand. This divided my own family, like my brothers took the stand on behalf of my stepdad, they kind of sided with mom, so my two oldest brothers did and a couple of aunts, well

> one aunt in particular, and my mom's parents, there were all kind of on mom's side. And then there was Monica's side, and that kind of involved me and my 2 sisters and my step siblings. And he was sitting there and he was just amazing because he couldn't tell the truth, I mean he was so convincing.
>
> I remember sitting in the back of the courtroom with my husband going, "if I didn't know any different I would believe him and how is this going to go?" And you just don't know. What probably I think saved us or really helped our side, we had a tape, an audio tape of him yelling at us, actually not at us, but my younger sister had been playing music one day and he came in and just started screaming at her to turn it off and calling her names and she got flustered and hit the record button and recorded it. So we have this 4 minute segment of him you know swearing and threatening and yelling and screaming and it was really funny because she found this during the initial parts of "what should we do?" and she gave it to me.
>
> So anyway on the stand my stepdad is totally denying that he would ever, you know, "I'm a strong family man and I would never hurt anybody." And so the lawyer would quote things off of the tape and like, "so are you saying you would never say...." And he's being like, "no, I would never say that." And so she would say, "so your categorically denying that you would never say anything like that and he's like, "no, I never would." So when that got admitted, it didn't get played in court but the transcripts got entered, I think that just totally reduced his credibility, I mean, I don't know, maybe he still would have got convicted, but for me that was the big turning point.
> (Conversation 1, p.10-11)

As a result of the trials, Monica's stepdad was sentenced to 4 years in prison although Monica has indicated that he only actually served about 2/3rds of that time. Her mother went to visit him in prison and also took the two youngest girls for visitation. Paul was eventually paroled and now he is totally free.

Although the initial outcome of the trials can be seen as positive, Monica still paid a very heavy price for standing up for herself and her siblings. It is probable that many of her relationships within her family are now strained. This is especially true between Monica and her mother. Monica confided that today, their relationship is basically non-existent.

> She has disowned me. I basically haven't had a relationship with her in 10 years, well since all this happened, basically since the wedding because it was right after the wedding that we, the wedding is the last time that I really, that we saw each other or anything you know, that's

> kind of the anniversary of our relationship ending. Since that time, at first I would show up on her doorstep and I would try to explain and I would, I have written her letters, in the first year or so I maybe got 1 or 2 letters, mostly full of guilt trips and manipulation and her way of seeing things. But since then, I didn't hear anything from her, I haven't heard from her in 9 years, over 9 years, and I showed up last summer and she talked to me, we sat on her porch and had coffee and cookies. I caught her off guard, like I said, I hadn't seen her in 9 or 10 years and I showed up there, I needed some closure. There's still no acknowledgment of what happened. She thinks I have been influenced by therapists, I 'm a victim of a false memory syndrome, because you know she couldn't quite figure out what I would want revenge on. (Conversation 1, p.11-12)

Monica was also cut off from her 2 youngest siblings as a result of her disclosure and of the court case. The siblings she was trying to protect, the girls that she called 'her own,' don't really even know her anymore.

> She cut me off, I haven't seen them in 10 years. I send them Christmas cards, the first few years I kept a bank account open for them and I would send them birthday cards, a couple of times I even showed up to drop things off, gifts for them at Christmas. My husband's family lives about 8 miles from where my mom lives, so when we go back there, I'm always like, "where are they?"
>
> When I went back there in the summer, one of them was home and I saw Heather and I had an opportunity to talk with her a little bit with my mom there, and didn't have an opportunity to say anything I wanted to say, you know, but did have an opportunity to let her know that I loved her and I was open to having a relationship with her. I had no way of knowing if she was getting cards that I was sending. And so that was in August and then I saw both of my sisters at grandpa's funeral last October, and the one sister who I hadn't seen was very cold toward me, she's very angry, she doesn't understand. All they have heard is my mother's side of the story. The other one was more friendly, by nature she's that way and she's a little bit older and has more memories of me I think, you know so she would actually talk to us. But since then I have written birthday cards and Christmas cards and they have never written back, but that doesn't surprise me because when I lived at home, I wouldn't have either. They both still live at home and you know you do everything you can to make mum happy. (Conversation 1, p.12)

Although Monica doesn't have a relationship with her 2 youngest siblings right now, they are still young and there is hope. One wonders whether her relationship with her mother will ever be the same. Monica, however, has indicated that she does not want the same

relationship, but rather she would prefer a new relationship, perhaps on a different level.

Through everything that Monica has experienced, it is not surprising that she has some great insights about disclosure. When I asked her if she had ever thought of disclosing as a child, this was her response.

> I think I disclosed in a lot of ways that people just never picked up on. For example, in grade 7, all of my papers were on child abuse and suicide, you know a lot of the signs were there. I was an extreme, an extreme overachiever and perfectionist, I had no self-esteem and you know none of that was picked up on. (Conversation 1, p.13)

It seems that one of the reasons that Monica has always adopted an adult role, even as a child, may have been because most of the adults in her life let her down. Still, in retrospect, she has indicated to me that she is still glad that she disclosed.

> I'm glad that I ended up doing all that I could to protect the girls and I guess that involved telling my mom. She didn't do anything to protect us so I don't really see that as part of it. Disclosing has cost me a lot but it has also given me back a lot in terms of my own self-respect and standing up for what I believe in. (Conversation 1, p. 13)

Monica seemed to be very honest with me about her experiences with disclosure. Although overall she seems to be happy with her decision, she is quick to point out that there were negative consequences. When I asked Monica what disclosure has meant to her life, this was her response.

> Well like I say, it has cost me my relationship with my mother, and to some extent with my sisters, at least for now. But it's given me back my relationship with myself, I guess that's how I would describe it. (Conversation 1, p.13)

It seems as though we, as members of society, often see disclosure as a choice, but is it a choice when the choice is between saving yourself or betraying your family? Sometimes disclosure is necessary for a person to survive. It is evident that survivors' experiences with disclosure also have a lot to do with the responses they get from their confidantes. As Monica points out, these responses can greatly affect a survivor's healing.

> Disclose as early as you can, but I think the response you get from disclosure has such a big impact on the healing, you know that is crucial. Like my healing process would have been much shorter had I received a supportive response, you know, it was harder

> dealing with being abandoned by my mom than it was dealing with having been sexually abused. More of my time in therapy was spent dealing with that than the sexual abuse. (Conversation 1, p.14)

For most survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse, it seems that it is the betrayal of trust and the lack of validation that hurts most. The physical act of sexual abuse can be forgotten but the emotional consequences may last forever, including those that result from disclosing to unsupportive confidantes who are close to us, like Monica's mother.

> The reason we couldn't disclose to my mom is because she would see the physical abuse and not do anything. So it was kind of like, what's the point? Apparently my younger sister disclosed once when we were still living at home, about 14 or 15 years old. And we had a family meeting I guess where my mom and Paul and we were all there and she asked us if he had ever hurt us and she thought the meeting was about sexual abuse, but I thought the meeting didn't make sense because she was asking us if he ever hurt us and I was like, you're there, you know, so I just kind of denied it because that seemed to be what she wanted to hear.
>
> When we disclosed about other people who had abused us, there was like a neighbor down the road who had abused my sister, one time a native in a park came on to us, another time some guy through some church that my mom knew, he would come over and try to French kiss us and try and touch us and stuff. We didn't disclose about him until quite a bit later but some of the other ones when we disclosed, my mom would take a stand and she would be totally outraged, she wrote columns for papers and she wrote one about dirty, old men and how to safe-proof your kids. I mean it was just a very, she worked on a crisis line, she knew this stuff. (Conversation 1, p.15)

As is often in cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse, the mother is faced with choosing sides, often between a husband she loves and a child who is in pain. This decision can often be very difficult and either the spouse or the child may suffer. In Monica's case, it was she who had to bear the burden of disclosing. Needless to say, as Monica has indicated previously, she still does not regret disclosing.

> Well I think it's important to emphasize that regardless of how things have turned out, I don't regret disclosing, I guess that would be the big thing and I guess to disclose to somebody that would be supportive because I think that's the key to a lot of the healing that has to happen. (Conversation 1, p.15)

As stated earlier, Monica has most often in her life taken on the role of the responsible,

care-taking family peace keeper. She has indicated to me that she is now learning to be more spontaneous. Thus another journey begins.

Chapter 9

Discussion

Revisiting Narrative

The rationale for my choice of narrative inquiry as a methodology was to learn about survivors' experiences through their stories. I thought that we could better understand a survivor's experience if we knew more about the context. The question then some may ask is, how do we know if the utilization of narrative inquiry has been successful? Robinson and Hawpe (1986) explain;

> Establishing a fit, that is making a story out of experience, is a heuristic process, one which requires skill, judgment, and experience. When it is successful, the outcome of story making is a coherent and plausible account of how and why something happened (p.111).

I believe that employing narrative inquiry has indeed been successful for the simple fact that the participants' stories ring true and I feel that I have learned a great deal from them. In other words, the details of each of the stories that the four women told were believable to me. On an intuitive level, I felt that there was no fabrication in any of the stories told.

Narrative may be a fairly 'new' methodology but it is not a new practice as it is "rooted in our ancient heritage of story telling" (Bruner,1990, p.45). As Widdershoven (1993) illustrates, stories are in essence what life is about and "the meaning of life does not exist independent of the stories that are told about it" (p.4). Stories are the interpretation that we have of our own lives and as time passes, our stories may change, largely because our interpretations have changed. "Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative...and recounting one's life is an interpretative feat" (Bruner,1987, p.13).

In essence, when we read or listen to stories, we are often learning about life as lived. This has been the case in this study where four women have shared their stories concerning their experiences of sexual abuse and disclosure. The stories they have shared are attempts to explain and understand their own experiences (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986).

It is hoped that through the sharing of these stories, we can all gain a better understanding of the complexities involved in survivors' experiences with disclosure. "Narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of shared reality can be transmitted" (White, 1980, p.6).

Shared Realities

Introduction

As I listened to the participants' stories, as I read and re-read their stories, I discovered that although there were similarities, each individual had unique experiences. As Josselson (1995) emphasizes, "narrative approaches allow us to witness the individual in her or his complexity and recognize that although some phenomena will be common to all, some will remain unique" (p.33). The experiences of the four survivors not only reflected issues such as the timing of disclosure, the relational issues and the impact of disclosure, but they also reflected more in-depth issues such as the meaning of disclosure.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

In addition to telling me their stories about their experiences with disclosure, the participants also shared with me their childhood experiences of sexual abuse.
All four of these women were sexually abused in childhood by a family member, Angela was sexually abused by her cousin at the age of 6, Valeria by her grandfather starting at age 8, Nita by her cousin starting at age 9, and Monica by her stepfather also at age 9. Although all four of these women were abused by different family members and had different relationships with those family members, all of the perpetrators were in a position of trust.

In terms of the aftereffects of their experiences of sexual abuse, depression was experienced by three out of the four participants, thus making it the most common consequence experienced by the survivors. Some of the other aftereffects that were mentioned in the stories included suicidal thoughts or attempts, self-mutilation, anorexia, alcohol abuse, revictimization in later years, and low self-esteem. Other aftereffects that have been rarely mentioned in the current literature included chronic yeast infections,

boundary problems such as knowing how and when to express wants or needs, sexuality issues, and being an overachiever or a perfectionist.

Another issue that I found interesting in terms of the survivors' experiences of sexual abuse was the intergenerational aspect. Angela's mother admitted to her that she had been sexually assaulted and almost raped by Angela's perpetrator's father. Similarly Valeria admitted that her aunt was sexually abused by her perpetrator (grandfather) and she thinks her mother was as well. I think it is important to note these issues because they may have an impact on understanding the survivor's experience with disclosure. The timing of disclosure, the relational aspects and the impact of disclosure on the survivor are all connected to the survivor's overall experience of being sexually abused, which includes the aftereffects as well as the intergenerational issues involved.

Timing Issues

In terms of the timing of disclosure for the participants in this study, I found it interesting that all four women first disclosed in their mid-to-late teens, and in every case the first person they disclosed to was a friend or boyfriend. At a glance, one might then assume that these four individuals all had similar experiences, however by reading their whole stories, we can see that this is not the case. Each of these women had somewhat unique experiences in terms of when they disclosed and to whom and the circumstances surrounding that incident.

Angela reveals in her story that she did not view this first disclosure as a conscious decision,

> I was 14 and it just came out of my mouth, even before I could
> even think about it (Conversation 1, p.6).

This kind of experience brings up the issue of choosing to disclose. Does one choose to disclose or does one disclose because the person is emotionally and psychologically ready? Angela's future disclosures were more conscious decisions as she then chose to disclose to a few more friends, her professional therapist, and family members.

Like Angela, Valeria also disclosed for the first time in her mid-teens. Valeria disclosed to her boyfriend first but she didn't view this experience at the time as a

disclosure.

> I'm pretty sure I told him but it didn't seem like too much of a disclosure to me (Conversation 1, p.8).

Valeria views her first 'main' disclosure as the time she disclosed to her aunt. She views this disclosure as her main disclosure because as Valeria describes, "that's what set it off to the whole family" (Conversation 1, p.8). This was a very conscious decision as she was motivated to protect her cousins from being sexually abused by the same perpetrator (her grandfather).

> I knew my cousin, she was going down to stay with my grandparents and I knew, I just knew my grandfather and I had this feeling that he couldn't keep his hands off of any girl, so I knew I had to tell her before she left. I just remember a sense of urgency... (Conversation 1, p.8).

Thus, Valeria thought about disclosing before she told her cousin and her aunt. Her decision was based on the fact that she wanted to protect her cousin from being sexually abused. Eventually Valeria's mother also found out about the abuse, indirectly, and because of that incident, Valeria felt she had no choice but to also disclose to her mother. From there, Valeria found herself disclosing to her grandmother and then confronting her perpetrator.

Nita first disclosed in her late teens to her best friend, followed by a psychologist and then an aunt who was close to her. It seemed that Nita also made very conscious decisions when she disclosed as she would often set deadlines for herself, such as doing it by New Year's Eve. Nita was part of a very close extended family and I think this is an important element to consider when trying to understand her choices about disclosure. For example, one of the reasons Nita chose to disclose to her father was that she felt he would have found out eventually anyway, through other family members that already knew about her experience. In addition to being part of a close extended family, Nita was also a part of a unique cultural group. This had a great impact on her experiences with disclosure. She explains that the topic of sexual abuse itself is a "no-no" in her culture and it is rarely if ever talked about, especially since a girl is expected to be a virgin when she

marries. The advice given to Nita by her physician, who is also a member of her cultural group, was as follows:

> Coming from the Asian background that we do, you will be labeled the black sheep, not him. So why tell others? Just be happy that you weren't raped and move on (Conversation 2, p.2).

This statement illustrates the potential barriers to Nita's decisions about disclosure. One of Nita's future hopes is to one day disclose publicly to the rest of her cultural community in order to help others who feel they must be silent. This hope may be a reflection of the reality in Nita's culture that women do not have a significant voice.

Like Valeria's experience, Monica first disclosed out of a motivation to protect her siblings from also being abused. She first disclosed to an adult friend and then to her mother. Soon after, Monica also disclosed to a social worker, her boyfriend and eventually other family members. Again the issue is raised, is disclosing a choice if one feels they are doing it out of necessity or what role does danger to others play in the decision to disclose?

There seem to be barriers and facilitators to making choices in terms of disclosure. One is faced with a situation that either has barriers or facilitators or both and then the decision is made. For example, in Nita's situation, she was faced with a cultural barrier, yet she disclosed anyway. In Monica's and Valeria's situation, they were both faced with the situation where they were both afraid for loved ones who were exposed to their perpetrators. This situation, one could say, facilitated their decisions to disclose. One thing we do not know, however, is without these facilitators, would Valeria and Monica have disclosed anyway, and without the cultural barrier would Nita have disclosed earlier?

Although one might assume that to describe the 'timing' of disclosure might be a simple process, we can see that it is more complicated. Timing issues are most often evaluated in terms of 'when?' but in order to understand the personal state of the past and present, contextual factors must be considered. For example, are there others who are in danger of being abused, are there people in your life who are available to disclose to, what are the cultural and family values about sexual abuse, and what are the potential risks and benefits of disclosing? Motivations to disclose vary and thus so does the choice of

confidantes. The relational issues in terms of the reactions and responses of confidantes are looked at next.

Relational Issues

An important part of the context are the people and relationships surrounding disclosure. The relational issues that are involved in terms of survivors' experiences with disclosure are complex. The responses from confidantes may differ based on the identity or choice of the confidante (i.e.. friend or family member). Also the relationship the confidante has to the perpetrator is significant in terms of understanding their responses. Keeping these issues in mind, I thought it was important to find out what the survivors in the study thought and felt about their experiences concerning these issues. The survivors' stories revealed the kind of responses they would value. In doing so they also provided advice to future survivors and confidantes who find themselves in any of these situations.

Angela:

After disclosing to her parents, Angela indicated she would have liked some more constructive emotional support. Angela revealed that the way her father shows support is by "handing over a cheque" and that she would have liked him to be more supportive vocally because she needed him to validate her and her experience. She contends that she likes the way her mother handled the situation but at times she would have preferred that her mother had "gotten her own therapist some days." Angela felt that her mother had some of her own issues to deal with and she felt that her mother needed to deal with those issues independent of her and her problems. She suggests to survivors that choosing an appropriate confidante is important and to look for someone they can trust and who will validate them. She suggested a survivor should pick someone who will not be judgmental. Angela asks future confidantes to please not be egotistical and ask questions such as, "why didn't you tell me?"

In essence Angela seems to be asking that confidantes respond to her as a person and treat her like a human being. Listen to her and do not criticize her for the choices that she's made because she has done the best she could at the time and she has made the right

decisions for her.

Valeria:

Valeria provides insights about the choice of an inside versus outside the family confidante. She explains that because her friends knew her and not her family that they did not question her. They trusted her and they did not have any emotional ties to the perpetrator or to any of Valeria's family members, therefore their loyalty was with her. Although she has good memories of disclosing to friends, her experience with disclosing to family members was somewhat different. Valeria's mother's response after the disclosure was unsettling to her because her mother's concern was that Valeria had told someone else (her aunt) first, rather than being concerned about the abuse or Valeria's experience. Similarly when Valeria disclosed to her grandmother, the experience was painful as her grandmother remained loyal to her grandfather.

In Valeria's experiences of disclosure, the issue of loyalty seems to prevail. Her friends were loyal to her and thus validated her story and supported her, whereas her family obviously had divided loyalties between Valeria and the perpetrator. To this day, Valeria's mother still seems to be divided, trying to support Valeria emotionally but at the same time continuing a relationship with Valeria's grandmother and her perpetrator. Valeria also mentioned that she resented confidantes who asked, "why can't you forgive and forget?" Like Angela, this kind of question appears to deny the validity and reality of her experience.

Nita

Nita's thoughts and insights are focused on her family's reactions and responses to her disclosure. She indicates that she felt hurt when her father questioned her with, "are you sure?", after she first disclosed to him. Like Angela and Valeria, Nita feels that her experience was not acknowledged or validated by her family, especially the time when her father accused her of "doing it for attention." Her mother's reaction was to minimize the experience by framing it as "normal girl/boy relations." She then suggested that Nita forget about the whole thing and move on. This was also the response from Nita's grandmother. One wonders if these reactions were a cultural response. Is there denial in general about sexual abuse in Nita's culture? Considering that a young woman is

supposed to be a virgin when she marries and the blame would be placed on her and not the perpetrator of the crime, it is not difficult to imagine that the women in this culture would prefer that their daughters remain 'pure' to the rest of the outside members of the culture. Still, one cannot deny that these reactions were hurtful to Nita. She was not validated or believed or taken seriously by either of her parents. Nita has basically lost trust in her parents to protect her and to support her when she really needs them. She claims that in her mind she "doesn't really have parents" anymore. She needed help to deal with the aftermath of being a survivor of intrafamilial sexual abuse and they were not there for her. When I asked Nita what she would have preferred her father's reaction to have been, she answered that all she wanted was for him to have just believed her.

Monica

Monica's experiences with disclosure were similar to Nita's in the respect that her mother was in denial about Monica's experience. Monica emphasizes that in terms of disclosure, one should be aware of the possibility that a confidante may not believe you, or they may initially believe you and then turn around and change their minds. This is what happened to Monica after disclosing to her mother. She also warns that accusations of being a victim of false memory syndrome are also possible. In essence, Monica believes that if she had experienced a more supportive response and some acknowledgment of what happened, her healing process may have been shorter. This is especially true in terms of her mother's response. Monica felt it was more difficult dealing with her mother's response and the abandonment she felt by her mother than the sexual abuse itself. Monica suggests that support is essential. Other survivors should try to disclose to someone they think will be supportive because she feels that is the key to a lot of the healing that needs to happen.

Again like Nita and Valeria, Monica was not validated or supported by her mother when she needed her most. Her mother's loyalties were divided and in the end she chose to support her husband.

Summary and Comments About Relational Issues

I decided to present these relational issues in terms of the survivors' reactions and feelings because I thought this would have the greatest impact. It is clear that disclosure is

an interpersonal process, the survivor and confidante have mutually interactive impacts on each other. The responses confidantes have after a disclosure do have consequences, especially when the confidantes are family members with long term relationships. By understanding what the survivor wants and expects in a response may help confidantes appreciate or anticipate their role. This is difficult because disclosures often just happen, confidantes may respond out of shock, surprise, or fear. Those that are in control of the disclosure may have to set parameters around the disclosure. For example, they may need to warn the person ahead of time that the subject matter may be disturbing, hurtful, emotional and difficult to hear. Still those in control of disclosing do not have control over the response. One then assumes that the person disclosing perhaps should prepare oneself for receiving both 'positive' or 'negative' responses.

Impact of Disclosure

For myself, one of the most interesting parts of this study was learning about the impact that disclosure had on the participants' lives. These issues included how their relationships changed with family members or friends, as well as the meaning of disclosure for the survivors which will be discussed later.

In terms of family relationships, it seems clear that after disclosure, these relationships either got closer or they grew farther apart. Whereas Angela claims her relationship with her mother grew closer because of the disclosure, in Monica's case, her mother disowned her. Valeria's relationship with her mother is also now more strained, largely because her mother chooses to continue a relationship with her perpetrator (mother's father). As indicated in the current literature, mothers seem to play an important role in the healing process of survivors (Everson et al., 1989; Lipovsky, 1991; Sauzier, 1989). There are several healing processes involved as the mother may have issues to resolve that are contradictory in terms of her being not only a mother, but also a partner and a person. Nita's case is slightly different because it is her father and not her mother that plays the role of the first choice of parental confidante in her life. She has indicated that there is still tension between herself and her father because of the disclosure and his reactions to it. Added to this is the fact that Nita's perpetrator (cousin) is still thought of

as a son to both of her parents.

It is evident that disclosure will inevitably have a continuing effect on one's future relationships, especially in terms of family. As the 'secret' is revealed, family members are often faced with loyalty issues. They may be asked to choose to either be loyal to the perpetrator or to the survivor. They may also be asked to redefine family, to end certain relationships or to reframe past views of family life. As is apparent by the stories that were shared by the survivors, these choices are influenced by many issues. Some of these issues may include; the past relationship to the perpetrator, their current relationship to the perpetrator, cultural values, moral values, their understanding of sexual abuse in general, and whether or not they are strong enough, emotionally and psychologically to deal with these issues.

One must recognize that the stories by the survivors concerning the impact of disclosure are unfinished. The fact that the secret is out will continue to have lasting effects. The feelings, thoughts and responses of confidantes will also continue to be influential. It is quite possible, that over time, an 'unsupportive' confidante may become 'supportive', or vice versa. We do not know at this time what the future holds for any of us.

Meaning of Disclosure

Although I felt it was important to look at the survivors' experiences in terms of timing issues, relational issues and the impact of disclosure, my overriding goal was to find out what kind of meaning disclosure had brought to their lives. Regardless of whether these four women described their experiences as positive or negative, or whether or not they felt they had supportive responses after disclosure, I wanted to find out how they viewed their experiences now, in terms of their overall experience. As stated earlier, although there are similarities between the four women and their experiences, they are still unique. This is also true in terms of the meaning that disclosure has brought to each one of their lives.

Closure

Although Angela indicates that she is glad that she disclosed, I sensed that perhaps

she would have liked to have done it differently. She mentioned and suggested to other survivors not to tell if they are not 'ready'. Angela wanted more control over who found out about her experiences, yet in the end the outcome was virtually the same. The secret was out. In her own words, the meaning that disclosure had to Angela's life concerned the issue of closure. "It's definitely sort of closed a chapter in my life, well it hasn't totally closed it but I've sort of left something behind, a part of life that I wouldn't take back because it's made me who I am" (Conversation 1, p.13). Angela appeared to view disclosure as a mechanism for moving on with her life. Her depression, self-mutilation attempts, and relationship difficulties seem easier to deal with now, knowing where her source of pain has come from. Disclosure, for her, was in a sense self-revealing.

Peace

Valeria indicated to me that because of her experiences with disclosure, she felt validated and that she finally recognized that the sexual abuse was not her fault. She recommended 'disclosure' to other survivors because she felt it was an integral part of her healing journey. Valeria has had to deal with a lot in terms of her experiences with disclosure. She not only disclosed to her aunt and her mother but she also ended up confronting her perpetrator. The responses from these confidantes were not all supportive. Still, in terms of the overall meaning that disclosure has brought to her life, Valeria described it as "a sense of peace" (Conversation 1, p.17). She can find peace in the fact that she now has nothing to hide, she is who she is and she expects people to accept her as is. She is not afraid to reveal her past because she knows that it was not her fault. Valeria seems comfortable with herself.

Inner Strength

Nita's experiences with disclosure have been greatly influenced by her family and their reactions to her disclosures. Nita has described telling the 'secret' as a burden that has been lifted. She says she feels like she is in remission from the aftereffects of the abuse. Like Cancer, she knows the journey is ongoing but for now she's O.K. Although Nita still has many family issues to deal with she is still glad that she told her family. Nita feels now that she can survive anything and that she can stand on her own two feet. In her own words, "for me it was a way of finding strength in myself" (Conversation 1, p.14).

For Nita, disclosure has meant learning about herself, the strength she had inside, as well as questioning cultural values and redefining family relationships. She learned to rely on herself in her time of need. She learned that self validation was just as, if not more important than outside validation from family members or friends.

Self-Respect

Monica's experience with disclosure began out of her concern for her siblings and her desire to protect them from her stepfather. She felt good about the fact that she did all she could for them. Monica, however, also admitted that there were costs to her such as the loss of the relationship she once had with her mother. Monica has had many ups and downs in terms of her experiences yet she does not regret disclosing. In Monica's own words, "disclosing has cost me a lot but it has also given me back a lot in terms of my own self-respect and standing up for what I believe in" (Conversation 1, p.13). What Monica gained in terms of self-respect outweighed the costs of disclosing. Ultimately, she had to be responsible to herself first, instead of being responsible for the whole family.

Concluding Comments

My goal in this chapter was not to deconstruct the participants' stories in order to find common themes among them, but rather to give the participants a unique voice in explaining what their experiences have been like in terms of disclosure. Although the timing of disclosures, the relational issues involved and the impact of disclosure on the survivor and confidantes are all important issues to understand, in the end what is important is the meaning of disclosure for the survivor. I, therefore, tried to illustrate through the participants' thoughts, the meaning that disclosure has had to each one of them. I think closure, peace, self-respect and inner strength are really just simple words that represent significant meaning to these survivors. The point is that disclosure indeed is not just an event, it has been personally meaningful in their lives. Getting beyond the surface aspects of disclosure, the when, who and what's of the experience, to the personal meaning may reveal the real place it has in the healing process, not only for the survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse but for other family members as well. Thus, I think it is important for us as members of this society to respect and understand the importance of

disclosure to survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse.

Chapter 10

Looking Toward the Future

Implications of the Study

The stories shared throughout this research study have value to other survivors, family members and friends who may become confidantes someday as well as to anybody who is personally or professionally concerned about the welfare of survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse. "When a story is told about particular experiences, it becomes a text from which to deepen awareness, explain events, enrich meaning, and inspire new possibilities" (Rehm, 1992, p.184). It is hoped that, through this research study, we are better able to fully understand survivors' experiences concerning disclosure. For example, the question I often get asked about my own personal experience is why didn't I tell someone sooner, or what made me keep the secret? It is difficult for me to answer this question without telling my whole story because the issues involved are complex. Through 'story' we are better able to understand the survivor's experience from a holistic perspective. It is evident that disclosure has profound meaning to survivors' lives and thus I think the importance of this issue for healing, treatment, future relationships and personal resolution must be emphasized. The survivors in this study have indicated how their confidantes have reacted to their disclosures as well as what responses they valued. For example, it was found that most of the survivors just wanted to be believed and validated. This information is valuable for those of us who may be confidantes for our own friends or relatives some day. Understanding the complexities of the issues surrounding disclosure will also be beneficial to those in the helping professions who work with survivors and who counsel those who are thinking of disclosing. It must be recognized that the issue of disclosure has personal implications as well as social ones. Survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse are members of our society and they may be more productive members if we address the issues involved seriously. Disclosure may have a great impact on survivors' healing, thus maing them more productive human beings.

I decided to utilize narrative inquiry because I believe stories impact people more than facts and figures. I think by reading or hearing someone's whole story, we are more able to relate to the experience both psychologically and emotionally. In essence, we can imagine a real person behind the facts and figures. "The construction of stories has both cognitive and social ramifications. If the story works, it influences what other people believe and can affect how they may act in the future" (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p.116). It is hoped that those who read this study will thus have a better understanding of disclosure both personally and professionally. For councilors or therapists working with survivors, hopefully these stories will give them a better understanding of the feelings and complex issues that are involved. Guiding a survivor through the process of disclosure can be very complicated and emotional. Family members can also benefit by understanding that disclosure is a difficult process and they in turn may learn to be sensitive about the responses they might give.

Further Research

In terms of further research, I think it would be beneficial if we understood not only the story of the survivor, but also the story of their confidante(s). In essence, I would like to hear the story from both sides. Maybe if we could better understand the feelings that confidantes have in reaction to a close friend or family member's disclosure, we could better understand the whole process. Perhaps better education is needed for all of us in terms of the issues surrounding sexual abuse in general. If we do not understand these issues, I think it would be difficult to be a supportive confidante.

Another area of future research that I think should be explored is the stories of both the perpetrator and the survivor in terms of confrontations. This of course may be a difficult avenue to pursue if the perpetrator denies the abuse. In any case, I think understanding the survivor's experience in terms of confrontation needs further examination.

One more area that would be interesting to pursue would be a longitudinal study concerning the long-term effects of disclosure. For instance, I would like to find out how the participant's view their experiences of disclosure in ten years time. I am sure there

stories would be different and it would be interesting to try and evaluate the long-term aftereffects of disclosure. I would also like to find out if over time their relationships with their confidantes, especially in terms of family members, have changed and whether or not the confidantes' reactions have changed. Relationships in families have a past, present and future. I think it might be interesting to find out how the experience of disclosure in a family has changed the structure of family relationships over time. It would also be interesting to find out if intergenerational patterns of abuse have changed. For example, did disclosure indeed protect future victims in the family?

I think that although the issue of sexual abuse in general seems to be talked about in the media, in schools and in the general public more now than perhaps 15 years ago, we still have a lot to learn in terms of survivors' experiences. The sexual abuse of children is still prevalent in our society, thus I think we still need to study the issues involved. I think we need to find out as much as we can about these issues in order to attempt to possibly diminish this crime in our society as well as to help those who have already suffered to survive.

Listening to the Voice of Survivors

When I met with the participants for the second time, I asked each of them who they would like to read this study. I wanted to know who they wanted to impact by this study and who they thought would benefit from reading something like this. Because they are the ones who have lived through the experience, I consider them the experts on most of the issues involved. The four women who participated in this study have had a voice in helping us to better understand disclosure. Thus I think it important to share their feelings about who they would like to read this study. Their responses were as follows:

Angela: Anybody and everybody that may be able to benefit from it.

Valeria: Abusers and anyone and everyone who has been through the experience. People who feel lost and alone or people in quest for knowledge and experience, anyone with an interest in this.

Nita: I'd like others who have been abused to read this story. It will help them to see that they are not alone. The turmoil they feel is normal. I know, for

me, reading about other survivors helped me to feel 'normal'...for perhaps the first time in my life.

Monica: Therapists working with survivors who are contemplating disclosure, survivors contemplating disclosure, and my mother.

The survivors' responses have implications for how these data should be shared. It seems clear that there are three distinct groups of people, mentioned by the survivors, that will benefit from a study such as this. They are other survivors, counselors or therapists working with survivors, and lay people in general. Perhaps by sharing this data with the various Sexual Assault Centres around the city as well as groups for survivors of sexual abuse, other survivors will be able to identify with the experiences shared by these participants. Counselors, psychologists and therapists may be impacted more adequately through professional journal articles, whereas lay people will probably gain the most impact through public newspaper or magazine articles. Impacting people through voice or oral communication such as public lectures or talks on these issues, I think could impact us all. Hearing someone's story, out loud, can be a very powerful experience.

I think it should be noted that without these four courageous women, this study would not have been possible. They have shared very personal stories for the greater good of human kind and I think they should be applauded for such an unselfish act.

Continuing My Story

My story began with my own personal experiences of sexual abuse and disclosure. I became interested in this topic for a thesis because of those experiences. I have spent most of this last year working on this research study and as I learned more about disclosure, and I as I heard the stories of other survivors, my story also changed and continues to change. "In the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflective relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story. As researchers, we are always engaged in living, telling, reliving, and retelling our own stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.418-9). I have shared part of my personal story and therefore what I have always held private, is now public. This simple act has now changed my story. "As a novel leads inevitably to its end, personal narrative

describes the road to the present and points the way to the future" (Josselson, 1995, p.35). The personal satisfaction in being able to pursue a research study that is close to my heart has been gratifying. I have learned a lot about myself during this whole research process and I have gained a sense of self that is difficult to put into words. This research project was essentially a chapter of my story, both personally and academically.

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Appendix A

Poster for the Gathering of Participants

Have you ever been sexually abused by a family member?

Have you ever disclosed this experience of abuse to someone?

If you are a male or female adult survivor (between the ages of 18 and 30) of sexual abuse by a family member, and you have disclosed this experience to someone in the past, you are invited to tell your story.

A research study is being conducted by a graduate student in the department of Human Ecology concerning these issues.

If you would like more information or you would like to volunteer for this study, please call Gail at #492-5141.

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

Study for Adult Survivors of Sexual Abuse or Incest

Researcher: Gail Manwaring
Graduate Student
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
3-65 Assiniboia Hall
492-5141

Supervisor: Dr. Dianne Kieren
Professor
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
3-71 Assiniboia Hall
492-5770

Participant Requirements:

1. Participants must be male or female adult survivors (18 - 30 years) of childhood sexual abuse by a family member.
2. Participants must have had at least one experience of disclosure in the past.
3. Participants must be able to speak and understand English.
4. Participants must be willing to be interviewed 1-2 times for approximately 1-2 hours each session.
5. Participants must also be willing to be contacted for 1-3 future meetings with the researcher, approximately 1/2 hour in length to verify analyses and results of the study. These meetings may be held in person or by telephone.
6. Participants must sign a written consent form.

What Happens Next?

If you meet the above criteria and would like to volunteer for this study, you will be contacted to set up interview times. All interviews will be held on campus. Initial interviews will be arranged for approximately 1/2 hour. Please note that not every participant chosen for these initial interviews will be chosen to complete a second in-depth interview.

During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences of sexual abuse and disclosure. You may refuse to answer questions which you are not comfortable in answering. All interviews will be tape-recorded and answers will be kept confidential. The tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. All transcriptions will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. The tapes will be transcribed into a typed written format for analysis, however individual names will not be attached to these. Your responses will be identified by a coded number or pseudonym.

The Participant's Rights:

You have the choice to participate in this study and you also have the choice to withdraw from the study at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable in answering.

If you have any questions or concerns please call Gail at # 492-5141 or Dr. Dianne Kieren at # 492-5770.

To Participate:

If you have read this information sheet and are still interested in participating in this study, please contact Gail at # 492-5141 to arrange a time for an interview. There may be limited spaces for participants in this study, however, all volunteers will be contacted. Thank-you for your time and interest in this study,

Gail Manwaring

Appendix C

Consent Form

Title: Adult Survivors of Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse

Researcher:

Gail Manwaring
Graduate Student
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
3-65 Assiniboia Hall
492-5141

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Dianne Kieren
Professor
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
3-71 Assiniboia Hall
492-5770

The focus of this study is to describe how adult survivors of sexual abuse or incest view their experiences. The main focus of the interviews will be on disclosure of the abuse and the meaning that disclosure has for survivors.

Your participation in the study will involve the following:

> You will be interviewed 1-2 times for a duration of approximately 1-2 hours each time.

> You also may be contacted for 1-3 follow up interviews to review and validate analyses and results of the study. These interviews will be approximately 1/2 in length and may be held in person or by telephone.

> The interviews will be arranged on campus for a time at your convenience.

> All interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed to written format.

> All information will be kept confidential. Code numbers or pseudo-names will be used.

> Any costs to you, such as parking, will be fully reimbursed.

The researcher and the research supervisor will have access to all information in the interviews, however individual names will not be attached to the interviews. Tapes will be coded by number or pseudonym, not by the participant's name. The information may be used in future publications, reports or presentations, however as stated above, no individual names will be connected to specific information.

As a Participant in this Study, Your Rights are the Following:

1. You may refuse to answer any question at any time in the interview.

2. You may stop the interview at any time.

3. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

4. You may call the researcher at any time with questions or concerns.

Please note that as in the case of all formal research studies, any information given to the researcher concerning the current harm or abuse of a child will be reported to the appropriate authorities (ie. child welfare).

Risks and Benefits to the Participant:

The risks to the individual for participation in this study may include the following; it is possible that as the participant is being interviewed, unpleasant memories or repressed memories, may surface unexpectedly, the participant is also at risk for delayed emotional effects after the interview is over or after some time has passed. Because the participants are giving very personal information of a very sensitive nature, they are at risk emotionally as well as psychologically.

There are no known direct benefits for participation in this research project. However, indirect benefits may include, the opportunity to help others who have been sexually abused, in terms of understanding disclosure, and the opportunity to educate the rest of society about the issues concerning survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse.

Please read the following and sign in front of researcher:

This is to certify that I .....(please print your name) agree to participate as a volunteer in this study. I am aware of the purpose of this study and I am aware that all of my interviews will be tape-recorded and later transcribed. I understand my rights including that I may withdraw from this study at any time. All other information will be kept confidential. I have read the above form and I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Date:

.....

Participant (please sign)

.....

Researcher's signature

.....

Appendix D

Sample Questions/Interview Guide

Note: This was a sample interview guide only, these questions were often answered out of order and various other questions concerning disclosure and sexual abuse were asked dependent upon the answers that were given by the participants.

Although these questions may not be exactly the same as those used in every interview, the first few questions were designed to develop a rapport with the participant.

1. Can you tell me why you decided to participate in this research project?

2. Can you start off with telling me a little bit about yourself?

3. How would a good friend describe you?

4. Many people have experienced sexual abuse as a child and often they are abused by a family member. Can you tell me about your experience of being sexually abused as a child?

5. Did you ever tell anyone or think about telling anyone about this experience as a child?
   i)who did you tell and why?
   ii)what happened?

6. Can you tell me about your first experience with disclosure?

7. What kind of reaction(s) did you get when you told about the abuse?

8. Did you expect that kind of reaction?

9. What kind of reaction would you have liked?

10. Can you tell me about any other experiences you had with disclosure?

11. Do you feel the reactions you have received after telling about the abuse, were supportive?
   If so, how were they supportive?
   If not, how were they unsupportive?

12. What has your experience with disclosure meant to you?

Appendix E

Resource Sheet For Participants

University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre
0405 Basement of SUB
492-9771
Hours: M-F (10a.m.-10p.m.)
Hours: Sat/Sun (6p.m.-9p.m.)

Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton
Suite 400, 9939 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J-2W8
#423-4102 (Business Hours)

Student Counseling Services
225 Athabasca Hall
492-5205

University Office of Human Rights
252 Athabasca Hall
492-7325

Alberta Mental Health Services
427-4444

Edmonton Social Services
428-5890

Emergency Social Services
427-3390

Student Legal Services
423-2226

University Health Services
492-2612

University Peer Health Educators
492-2644

Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic
427-2834

Community & Social Services Info.
424-3242

Alberta Alcohol & Drug Abuse Commission # 427-4291

Legal Aid
427-7525

Lawyer Referral Services
1-800-332-1110

24 Hour Crisis Help Lines

Sexual Assault Centre Crisis Line **# 423-4121**

Distress/Suicide Line **# 482-HELP (4357)**